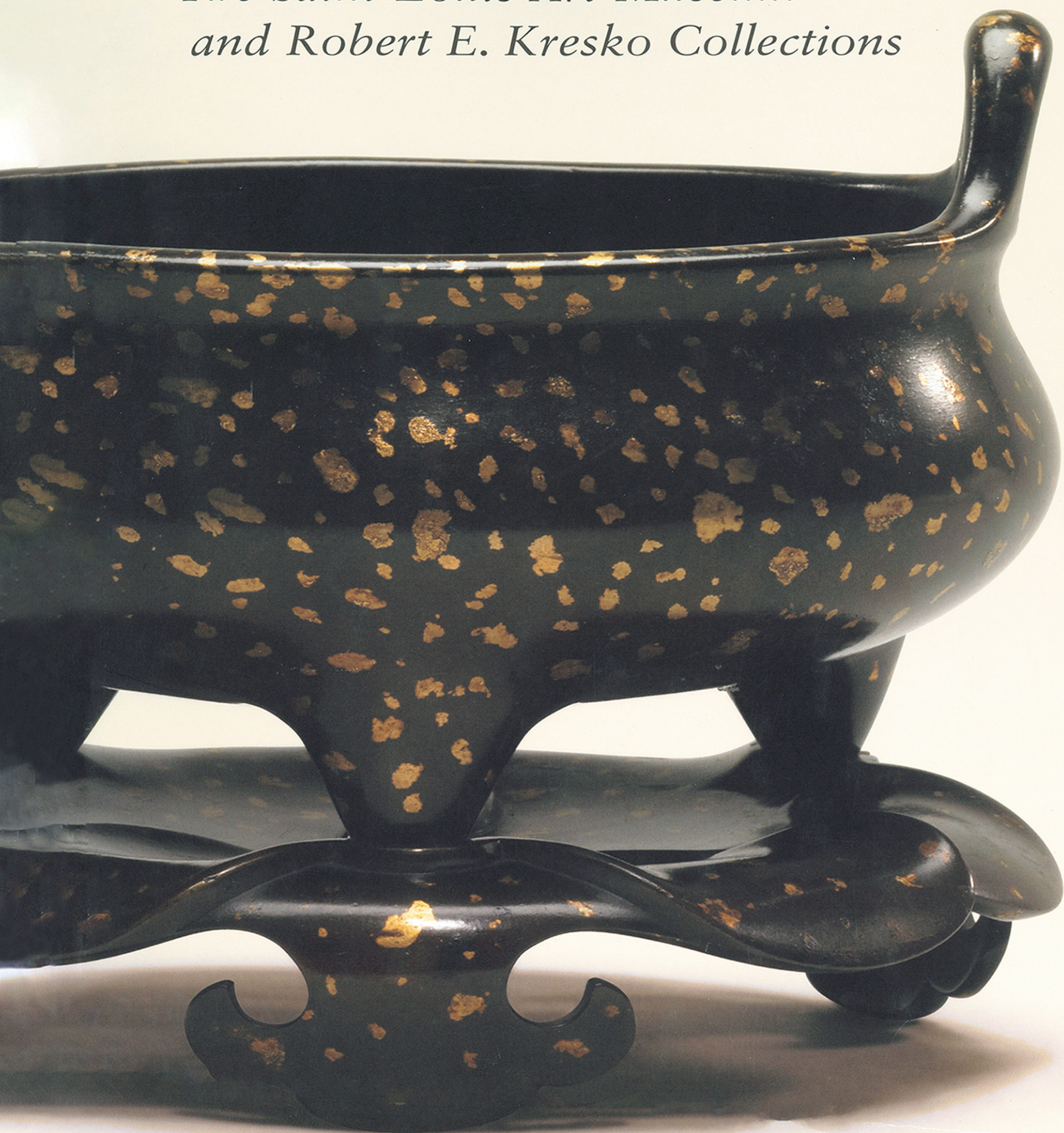


Later Chinese Bronzes

*The Saint Louis Art Museum
and Robert E. Kresko Collections*



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Ranging in date from the Northern Song (960–1127) through the Qing (1644–1911) dynasties, later Chinese bronzes constitute one of the most intriguing, yet least studied aspects of Chinese art, in part due to difficulties associated with connoisseurship and dating. However, recent art-historical research and scientific analyses have allowed for a better understanding of the stylistic, functional, and technical development of bronze-making during the final millennium of China's long imperial history. Later Chinese bronzes have finally emerged from the shadow of their ancient counterparts and may be appreciated as valuable works of art in their own right.

In 2005, with the partial and promised gift of Robert E. Kresko, the Saint Louis Art Museum became the repository of an outstanding group of later Chinese bronzes, complementing its distinguished collection of ancient Chinese bronzes. The Museum is now one of the rare cultural institutions outside China to have a full range of ancient and later Chinese bronzes, which it has made available in scholarly catalogues and beautiful installations.

Later Chinese Bronzes

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and Robert E. Kresko Collections*

SAINT LOUIS ART MUSEUM



Later Chinese Bronzes

*The Saint Louis Art Museum
and Robert E. Kresko Collections*

Philip K. Hu

with an Introduction by *Robert D. Mowry*,

a Collector's Profile by *Steven D. Ouyoung*,

and Technical Notes by *Laura Gorman*

SAINT LOUIS ART MUSEUM

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No. 28

雙沖耳三乳足鼎式灑金銅連座香爐

Tripod Censer with Loop Handles and Matching Stand

Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Kangxi period (1662–1722) through Qianlong period (1736–1795), 18th century

Cast bronze with applied gold splashes; height with stand 14.8 cm

Saint Louis Art Museum, Partial and promised gift of Robert E. Kresko

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Foreword

The Saint Louis Art Museum has long been known for its world-class collection of ancient Chinese bronzes, which was built up over several decades by purchases and gifts from local benefactors, most prominent among them J. Lionberger Davis (1878–1973). The 2005 gift of twenty-five later Chinese bronzes from Robert E. Kresko, a native St. Louisan, continues this tradition of building a personal collection with the Museum in mind. With Robert Kresko's magnificent gift, the Museum is able to document and display in its Asian galleries the very long history of Chinese bronze-making. Indeed, the Saint Louis Art Museum is now distinguished for being one of the only art museums in the Americas with major collections of fine Chinese bronzes, thoroughly catalogued and illustrated, from both the ancient and the later periods.

The selection of later Chinese bronzes that appears in the following pages has developed as an unusually concise yet superb collection, for it includes some of the finest pieces known of this particular medium. Chronologically the collection includes works from the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279) to the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) and includes bronzes created for functional, ritual, and decorative purposes. That Bob Kresko was able to build this collection, one carefully considered bronze at a time, since the early 1990s is a stellar example of how an individual can indulge the pursuit of fine works of art, select them in accordance with his taste and interests, and work in tandem with a museum whose complementary collection of ancient Chinese bronzes only benefits from proximity to the later works.

Robert E. Kresko stands out as a collector because his pursuit of the best examples of later Chinese bronzes has been disciplined, informed, timely, and very personal. He regularly sought out expert advice from curators, scholars, and dealers in advance of his acquisitions, then relied on his own instincts and taste to select what was worthy of the collection he was building. While the collection is not large, it is of very high quality and is represented by a nearly perfect range of periods and forms. The metalworking exhibits a similar breadth of expertise: instances of finely wrought, intricately detailed casting to the smoothly sensual and sculptural shapes of some of the larger vessels.

Bob Kresko's partial and promised gift of a significant portion of his collection of later Chinese bronzes was both generous and well-timed as the Museum had planned for several years the reinstallation of its Asian works of art in late 2004 and early 2005. When the Kresko later bronzes joined the ancient bronzes in the Chinese galleries, it was a momentous occasion that was celebrated at the time and will continue to be celebrated through the new

scholarship that has resulted in this book. We are grateful to Bob Kresko for bringing such an outstanding collection to St. Louis and for giving a substantial part of it to the Museum. We are further thankful that his generous support of the research and production of this catalogue has enabled the level of scholarship and publication these works of art deserve.

Museums are places of change. Not only do new works of art grace our galleries and galleries change with new designs and information, but new people bring different strengths. I am pleased to have the opportunity to thank the two curators of Asian art at the Saint Louis Art Museum who have shepherded this project from start to finish. Steven D. Owyong, curator of Asian art from 1983 to 2005, worked with Bob Kresko in building the collection and preparing the installation of the Asian galleries in late 2004 and early 2005. Steve's perspective on how the Kresko collection was established is included as a collector's profile in this volume. Philip K. Hu, associate curator of Asian art since 2006, has devoted his formidable research and writing skills to preparing this catalogue. We are grateful for both their efforts. We were especially fortunate to be able to enlist the expertise of Robert D. Mowry, the Alan J. Dworsky Curator of Chinese Art at the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, who helped us evaluate the bronzes from technical and art-historical perspectives and who contributed the introductory essay to the book. Our objects conservator, Laura Gorman, conducted a technical analysis of each of the bronzes and her findings are noted throughout the book.

These are beautiful objects that delight the eye. But for those readers whose appreciation is enhanced by knowledge of why these bronzes were created, how they may have been used, what forms they followed from more ancient patterns, and what the inscriptions tell, I encourage a careful reading, for there is much to learn.

Brent R. Benjamin
Director, Saint Louis Art Museum

Acknowledgments

In March 2005, the Saint Louis Art Museum received from Robert E. Kresko a gift of a significant group of later Chinese bronzes, ranging in date from the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279) to the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). When I joined the staff of the Museum in April 2006, one of my first assignments was to prepare the catalogue of the Kresko collection. I am most grateful to Brent R. Benjamin, Director, and Andrew J. Walker, Assistant Director for Curatorial Affairs, for offering me this challenging but rewarding opportunity. My predecessor, Steven D. Owyong, was instrumental in advising Bob Kresko in the formation of his collection. I thank Steve for his willingness to share his memories of the conception and early development of the collection, which are eloquently summed up in his collector's profile within this volume.

It was an added pleasure for me to work on this project because I have been acquainted for a number of years with the dealers Paul Moss of Sydney L. Moss Ltd., Howard and Mary Ann Rogers of Kaikodo, and James J. Lally of J. J. Lally & Co. Without their expertise over an extended period of time, the Kresko collection could not have grown to its present quality. When Paul visited St. Louis in early November 2006, we had the opportunity to see numerous other bronzes still in Bob's private collection. It became clear then that the catalogue should include these pieces to better illustrate the strength of the Kresko collection. I would like to express my deep appreciation to Bob Kresko for allowing me access to the bronzes in his home, and for agreeing to have them brought to the Museum for further examination and photography.

In terms of scholarship, I am deeply indebted to Rose Kerr and Robert D. Mowry for having paved the way in the study of later Chinese bronzes in the West. Kerr, who was keeper of the Far Eastern Department at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, has wide-ranging interests in ceramics and the decorative arts, but focused much of her attention on bronzes and metalwork of the Song, Jin, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s. Her research came to fruition in *Later Chinese Bronzes*, published in 1990. Mowry followed suit with an excellent exhibition catalogue, *China's Renaissance in Bronze: The Robert H. Clague Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes*, published in 1993. His treatment of individual works in considerable detail sparked much interest not just on this side of the Atlantic but also across the Pacific in East Asia. These pioneering studies remain indispensable for anyone wishing to learn about later Chinese bronzes.

It was decided at the outset that the Kresko bronzes would be studied not only from art historical and cultural points of view, but that they would be subjected to close technical

observation. The Museum's objects conservator, Laura Gorman, examined every piece in the collection, gleaning much useful information about casting techniques, methods of decoration, and in some cases, later repairs. Laura's detailed technical notes are appended to each catalogue entry and draw attention to physical aspects of the bronzes that might otherwise be overlooked. Robert D. Mowry, the Alan J. Dworsky Curator of Chinese Art at the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, came to the Saint Louis Art Museum to study the Kresko bronzes. Through careful handling, close observations, and extended discussions between Bob Mowry, Laura Gorman, and myself, we were able to draw firmer conclusions about dating, which is one of the most formidable aspects in any study of later Chinese bronzes.

The Museum's excellent art research library, Richardson Memorial Library, furnished a great deal of my immediate reference needs. Hard-to-find and obscure books and articles began appearing on my desk in rapid succession, thanks to reference librarian Clare Vasquez who processed many interlibrary loan requests on my behalf. Dealers' catalogues and auction catalogues turned out to be a major source of information. I am particularly indebted to Brian Harkins, William Lipton, Hugh Moss, Paul Moss, and Alexander Zacke for expediting several out-of-print catalogues into my hands.

The bronzes in Bob Kresko's home were brought to the Museum for photography in 2006 and 2007. The movement of the bronzes to the photography studio, conservation lab, and galleries was organized by the registrar, Jeanette Fausz, and undertaken by head preparator Kurt Christian and his able crew. Patricia Woods, image and rights manager, carefully coordinated the photography. The attractive photographs reproduced in this book were taken by Jean Paul Torno. I could not have asked for a better editor than Mary Ann Steiner, the Museum's publications director. She gently cajoled me to write with greater clarity and concision. Jen Collins and Fontella Bradford supplied additional editorial support. The elegant layout of the book is the work of Jon Cournoyer, senior graphic designer, while smooth production of the catalogue was carried out by Lauri Kramer. My research assistant, Mimi C. Huang, provided practical and moral support throughout the process.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my parents, Dr. and Mrs. Hu Tsu Teh, my sisters Fiona, Stella, and Jennifer, and other close relatives who live in Singapore, for their unstinting support of this far-flung member of their family. And, for the many friends in St. Louis and elsewhere who put up with me as I seemingly vanished for weeks and months on end while writing this catalogue, I now invite you to enjoy the extraordinary Kresko collection of later Chinese bronzes.

Philip K. Hu
Associate Curator of Asian Art, Saint Louis Art Museum

Robert Kresko and Collecting Chinese Art

Steven D. Owyong

The Robert E. Kresko Collection of later Chinese bronzes is built on a vision of giving. For Bob Kresko, giving is a personal commitment inspired by the patronage and mentoring he received first from the late Chapin S. Newhard who made it possible for him to attend Brown University and as a member of the United States Marine Corps. As a businessman in real estate development, Kresko's acumen and success provided the means for him to return in good measure the long and steady support of his hometown St. Louis. The beneficiaries of his generous contributions are the city's leading social and cultural institutions, including the Saint Louis Art Museum and its broad public.

The inspiration for Kresko's art collecting was his longtime friend and business partner, Trammell Crow. For decades, Crow had decorated his homes, offices, and hotels with Western and Asian art. His holdings of South Asian, Chinese, and Japanese works grew so large that he established the Trammell and Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art, a private museum in Dallas. While abroad on buying trips, Crow would occasionally send curios to Kresko, small "gifts" of Chinese artwork. Kresko soon concluded that there were cultural interests that matched his own curiosity and that among the most fulfilling were certain areas of Chinese art.

Back in St. Louis, Kresko decided to build a collection, but there was the initial quandary: what to collect? Whatever the category or medium, the artwork itself had to be profound and compelling. Moreover, the collection needed to reflect Kresko's own taste and character. He considered the group of steatite carvings sent to him over the years by Crow, small yet

exquisite works of Chinese soapstone art but altogether shy of the mark that Kresko wanted to make. Seeking options and advice, Kresko contacted the Saint Louis Art Museum with his intention that the collection, whatever it might be, would eventually be donated to the institution for the benefit of St. Louis.

The decision to acquire later Chinese bronzes was not easily made and came only after discarding other, more obvious choices. Kresko was set against fragile porcelains and pottery, and the same for decorative jades that were too precious by half. He insisted on works that would weather his socially active house in Ladue and hold their own atop a table or on an open shelf. Heavy metalwork seemed to fit the bill. He considered ancient bronzes but their hoary surfaces were fickle, friable, and subject to corrosion during humid St. Louis summers. Furthermore, at the time, the collecting of archaic vessels was fraught with pitfalls and prickly issues of provenance and patrimony. The collecting of later Chinese bronzes, however, was not. In fact, Ming and Qing bronzes were altogether different from ancient bronzes. Darkly but beautifully patinated, subtly shot with gold and silver inlay and leaf, later bronzes resounded of China's imperial past. Many bronzes bore reign marks, including that of the emperor-esthete, Xuande. According to one tale, the emperor commanded the palace workshops to cast ritual vessels from a mysterious, alchemical alloy of gold, silver, bronze, and jade. Thereafter, the legendary Xuande bronzes were considered touchstones for the highest quality in bronzework. Revered by emperors, weighty, and enduring, bronze was a venerable medium and it struck a resonate chord with Kresko.

Kresko first gathered a group of noted dealers of Chinese art to advise him. Many were considered the foremost experts in New York and London. Taking stock of the market and the competition, Kresko found that two catalogues on later bronzes had been published, one by the Victoria and Albert Museum and the other by the Phoenix Art Museum. Several other books had been published as sales catalogues that featured the remarkable inventory and scholarship of the London dealer Paul Moss. These milestones on the subject gave Kresko a fair idea of the quality and character of existing major collections as well as the prevailing academic research. Kresko discovered that although American museums and private collectors had great interest in antiquities, they cared little or not at all for the "minor" or "decorative" arts such as "later" bronzes. The exception was the Clague holdings of later bronzes, a complete collection of bronzes that found their way to the museum in Phoenix. There also existed the Ulrich Hausmann collection somewhere in Europe, a fabled group of superior works held in private and known only by reputation. But other than the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, there seemed to be no substantive museum collections in the West. Kresko saw a niche, an opportunity to collect seriously in a relatively neglected area of art where works of exceptional quality remained select but available. Every indicator in the later bronze market confirmed Kresko's decision to begin collecting.



Robert E. Kresko

It was clear from the start that only works of quality, rarity, or art historical importance would be considered for the Kresko collection. In 1991, the word went out to Sotheby's and to private dealers. Within months, offers of fine bronzes began to cross Kresko's desk. One of the first works to enter the collection was a lobed vase with gold-splash decor and beautifully wrought figures of mythical animals (No. 21). Acquired through Paul Moss as a gift to his wife, Dorothea Nelle, Kresko started the collection with a flourish. Moss, third generation of Sydney L. Moss, London, quickly supplied a complement to Dorothea Nelle's gold-splashed vase—an ovoid tripod with an exceptionally rich, dark patina and very similar finely modeled mythical animals in low-relief (No. 33). Kresko came to have a long working relationship with Moss who, with a keen eye and great flare, stocked some of the finest Ming and Qing bronzes on the market, many of which found their way to the Kresko collection.

From the early 1990s, the Kresko collection grew at a good but well-measured pace. Roger Keverne offered Kresko a small but beautiful vase entwined with a writhing gilt dragon (No. 29); that work was followed by Keverne's offer of an exceptional bestial censer (No. 34). Anthony Carter presented the first (No. 5) of two arrow vases to enter the collection; the second (No. 13) came from Sydney L. Moss. Kresko then acquired an altar vase precisely dated to the late fifteenth century (No. 4), a desired combination of true rarity and art historical import, from Mary Ann and Howard Rogers of Kaikodo. The Rogerses also discovered the grand censer with openwork cover (No. 14) that entered the collection. The great weight of the censer inspired what Kresko came to call "the heft factor," a personal criterion that Bob occasionally resorted to when deciding on an acquisition. Three fabulous inlaid works, an animal vessel (No. 6), a double vase (No. 37), and the Hu Wenming tripod (No. 9) were then offered in succession by Paul Moss.

In 1997, Kresko obtained a small but exquisite covered censer with sea creatures amidst waves (No. 38), again from Moss. At about the same time, Anthony Carter offered what became the unofficial mascot of the Kresko collection, the gilt censer in the form of an entertaining maned lion-dog (No. 2). Next, Kresko struck a coup in the field of Chinese art by acquiring from Moss the Daoist ritual vessel (No. 15), an exceptionally rare find of historical and religious significance. The Kresko holdings have several Daoist and Buddhist works, including figural sculpture. Ralph M. Chait Galleries presented a fine and rather large seated Buddhist figure (No. 3) of significant age and importance. James J. Lally of New York surprised Kresko with a grand palace confection: a bronze of massive size with matching imperial wood cover and stand (No. 17). With an impressive Rockefeller provenance from upstate New York to augment “the heft factor,” the bronze eventually became the centerpiece of the Kresko collection by virtue of its great size and magnificence.

Within fifteen years, Kresko had a group of highly select works from the greatest sources in the West. Then came the news from Beijing that a private collection of later Chinese bronzes had just sold at auction for record-breaking and astounding prices. Within days, later bronzes were the talk of the town, and the nouveau riche of China were clamoring for more. Had they been available, any bronze of quality would fetch its weight in gold. But many if not most of them were sitting on the tables, shelves, and mantelpieces of the Kresko house in Ladue.

It is often imagined that collecting is a solitary endeavor: a lone collector divining the marketplace and miraculously discovering treasures to amass and to hoard. Robert Kresko had no such illusion and no such intent. He knew instinctively that the art arena was a collective and that academics, curators, and dealers were all part of a greater field, and that the dealers in particular were indispensable sources of fine art and information. Dealers are and always have been essential to the field; no true collecting takes place without them. Early on, Kresko sought advice from his sources—the highly experienced experts among the private dealers and the rare but dedicated scholars among them like Paul Moss, Howard and Mary Ann Rogers, and Jim Lally. Kresko found them learned teachers who taught him about quality, connoisseurship, the market, and the competition. Armed with such knowledge and a generous purpose, Kresko transformed his curiosity about art into an exceptional collection and a lasting gift to his city.

Steven D. Owyong

Curator of Asian Art, Saint Louis Art Museum, 1983–2005



Later Chinese Bronzes: An Overview

Robert D. Mowry

Until recently, few American collectors paid any heed to later Chinese bronzes, those vases, censers, and other vessels and implements created from Song times (960–1279) through the later dynastic era—comprising the Yuan (1279–1368), Ming (1368–1644), and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties—and into modern times. In fact, only three important collections of later Chinese bronzes have been assembled in the United States to date, including those in the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, assembled by William Thompson Walters (1819–1894) and Henry Walters (1848–1931); the Phoenix Art Museum, assembled by Robert H. Clague (1913–1995); and now the Robert E. Kresko Collection at the Saint Louis Art Museum. Although other American museums boast important, if limited, holdings of later bronzes, only the museums in Baltimore, Phoenix, and St. Louis claim extensive, focused collections formed by knowledgeable collectors.

Despite neglect, such later bronzes recount a telling story about China's engagement with the early, formative stage of Chinese history and culture, the Great Bronze Age, comprising the Shang (c.1766–1050 B.C.), Zhou (c.1050–221 B.C.), Qin (221–206 B.C.), and Han (206 B.C.–A.D. 220) dynasties. In fact, in many ways, later China's involvement with antiquity parallels the Italian Renaissance's reconnection with the ancient Greco-Roman past.

China and Italy each had a glorious and storied past during which the foundations of each culture were laid. For Italy, that hallowed past was the Roman Empire; for China, it was the Great Bronze Age. In both cases, however, those classical foundations were toppled in the early centuries of the Common Era by decay from within and by barbarian invasions from without. New religions and traditions took root, permanently altering the course of historical and cultural development in both civilizations. Christianity, which had arisen in

the Middle East, made its way to Rome and came to the fore in the fourth century, after Emperor Constantine (280–337; r. 306–337) declared it the state religion. Buddhism, which had arisen in Nepal and northern India, reached China via the Silk Route at least as early as the first century A.D. and came to dominate during the third, fourth, and fifth centuries—during the period of disunion following the collapse of the Han dynasty. The Renaissance’s classicizing architecture and sculpture signal Italy’s reconnection with the ancient past beginning in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, while the later bronzes symbolize China’s re-engagement with antiquity beginning in the Song dynasty.

Although a variety of arts flourished in ancient Greece and Rome, by Renaissance times the major artistic monuments surviving from antiquity were sculpture and architecture, both typically crafted in stone. By contrast, because the ancient Chinese constructed their buildings of wood and typically created only small-scale sculptures, the major monuments surviving from early times were not architecture and sculpture but jade implements and bronze ritual vessels. In turning to the distant past for inspiration, later artists naturally looked to the arts that survived: Italian Renaissance artists to classical architecture and sculpture, Chinese artists of the Song dynasty to ancient bronze ritual vessels.

Viewing it as a utopian age with just rulers, Chinese historians and philosophers came to regard the period we call the Great Bronze Age as China’s Golden, or Classical, Age. More importantly, they rightly recognized it as the era during which lived those philosophers who would become the mainstay of Chinese social, ethical, philosophical, and even political traditions: Confucius (Kong fuzi; 551–479 B.C.), Mencius (Meng zi; c. 372–289 B.C.), Lao zi (c. fourth century B.C.), and Zhuang zi (c. fourth century B.C.). During the Song dynasty, the bronzes and jades that survived from the Bronze Age became the cultural icons and artistic symbols of that noble age.

In the Shang dynasty, early in the Bronze Age, Chinese craftsmen advanced bronze casting to a level of technical virtuosity unsurpassed even in modern times, producing superb ritual vessels whose form and decoration delight the eye and whose flawless casting documents early technological prowess. The culture associated with Bronze Age China came to a close not because the art of casting was lost or because iron displaced bronze as the preferred metal, but because that culture was transformed by the secularization of late Zhou and Han society, by the dissolution of empire, by the rapid growth of the Buddhist church following the collapse of Han, and by the arrival of new goods and ideas through ever-expanding trade over the Silk Route.

Differences in religious beliefs as well as evolution of religious practices led to the disappearance of many Shang ritual vessel types during the Western Zhou period (c. 1050–771 B.C.). During the Eastern Zhou period (771 B.C.–221 B.C.), increasing secularism bolstered

by rising interest in philosophy over religion—particularly philosophy of government and of social order (with emphasis on the relationship of people to ruler and of individuals to one another)—prompted a further reduction in the range of ritual vessel shapes, so that by the Han the number of vessel types was very limited indeed. As the newly prosperous Buddhist church grew in the Six Dynasties—i.e., that long period of disunion from the fall of the Han in A.D. 220 until re-unification under the Sui (581–618)—and as the ranks of the faithful swelled to include rulers and their families in those kingdoms in the Central Plains, the heartland of Bronze Age culture, the need disappeared even for the limited number of ritual bronze vessel types inherited from the Han. The growth of Buddhism, combined with ongoing religious and intellectual change, thus closed the door on Bronze Age culture and its ritual vessels.

From the Han through the Tang (618–907), China witnessed ever increasing contact with the outside world, most importantly through the influx of luxury goods via the Silk Route and through the travels to and from India of Buddhist monks, who brought home with them not only new religious treatises but new sculptural styles. As such luxury goods procured from Silk Route merchants became a part of daily life in wealthy and aristocratic circles, new industries arose in China to supply the market, producing, for example, gold, silver, and glass vessels in the style of luxury goods imported from points far to the West, particularly from ancient Iran. Potters quickly followed suit, mimicking the form of silver vessels in the then newly invented porcelain and appropriating decorative motifs from gold and silver pieces for their celadon wares. Probably copied from silver or glass imports, a few Tang ceramics even reflect influence from ancient Greece and Rome. Particularly favored were ewers and cups set on small, flaring pedestal bases that distantly echo those of Greek vases, the pedestal form transmitted from Greek vases to Roman vessels in glass and silver, thence to Iran, where they were imitated in glass and silver vessels, and finally to China. In addition, textile designers readily incorporated Persian motifs into their silks, and musicians assimilated the *pipa*, or lute, and other foreign instruments into their orchestras. By the Tang dynasty, China was an exceptionally cosmopolitan nation, the markets of its capital, Changan (present day Xi'an), filled with foreign goods, its streets trafficked by people of diverse nationalities and speaking exotic languages, and its restaurants featuring the enticing cuisines of faraway lands.

Playing on a long-dormant but deep-seated suspicion of things foreign, a faction at court sought political advantage by initiating a series of persecutions against the Buddhist church in 845, confiscating property, destroying temples, and returning monks and nuns to lay life. The move ushered in a period of cultural self-examination that lasted well into the Song and that sought to define Chinese culture by distinguishing the native from the foreign, always awarding pride of place to the native. As Buddhism waned, Confucianism reasserted itself, with renewed philosophical inquiry giving it the highly intellectualized

framework that distinguishes it as Neo-Confucianism. Native musical instruments, especially the *qin*—the classical zither that Confucius himself played—claimed primacy, relegating the *pipa* and other foreign instruments to professional entertainers. And on royal and aristocratic tables, refined, monochrome-glazed ceramics became the preferred wares, displacing, even if not wholly replacing, the gold and silver vessels that had been preferred in earlier times but that continued to reflect their foreign associations.

Antiquity served as the standard in identifying and defining things Chinese. Antiquarian interests fired an appreciation of Bronze Age antiquities, leading to the formation of collections of ancient bronzes and jades. Although works of painting and calligraphy had been collected at least since the Han and although serendipitous finds of ancient bronzes had always been considered auspicious, the systematic collecting of antiquities had to await the genuine interest in antiquity that came in the early Northern Song (960–1127).

Ancient bronzes doubtless were prized at first as tangible bits of history—something that such cultural icons as the Duke of Zhou (Zhou gong; c. 11th century B.C.) or Confucius might once have held. Scholars quickly realized that many ancient bronzes bear inscriptions and that those inscriptions constitute ancient documents—the earliest documents then known—so that they were of cardinal importance to historians and epigraphers. Such discoveries gave new impetus to historical research, just as they propelled the study of epigraphy to the fore, since the inscriptions were written in bronze script, an ancient form of writing that had not been used for nearly a thousand years, even if it was the distant ancestor of all later written Chinese. Finally, bronzes came to be accepted on their own merit as works of art. As historical documents, works of art, and relics of the hallowed past, archaic bronzes were eagerly collected by emperors, well-to-do scholar-officials, and aristocrats—who are often shown surrounded by them in paintings of the Song and later periods, particularly when the scholars are shown at their leisure in garden settings. Indeed, such paintings often are entitled *Baigu tu*, or “A Hundred Antiquities.” The renewed interest in historical studies during the Song resulted in the compilation of numerous catalogues, whether of paintings, ancient bronzes and jades, or botanicals, among many other topics. Such illustrated collection catalogues compiled during the Song served as models not only for catalogues compiled in later periods but for many later bronzes and ceramics as well.

The literati not only collected ancient bronzes but, on special occasions, used them as incense burners and flower vases, particularly when learned friends of like mind gathered to enjoy themselves in such refined pastimes as painting, composing poetry, playing the *qin*, competing in *weiqi*, and viewing collected paintings and antiquities. Probably from the inscriptions on their collected pieces, they understood that they were using the ancient vessels for purposes other than the rituals for which they originally were made. For example, the bronze *gui* vessels that they pressed into service as incense burners were used in antiquity

for offering cooked grains to the spirits of deceased ancestors, just as the trumpet-mouthed *gu* and *zun* vessels in which they displayed floral arrangements originally were designed to present offerings of warmed wine to those same spirits. Realizing that too frequent use would damage or perhaps even ruin their prized antiquities, the literati sought newly made vessels of similar shape and decoration in bronze and ceramic wares, encouraging both the renaissance in bronze and the taste for the archaism that is a hallmark of later Chinese culture. In shunning the recent past in favor of the ancient, the people of Song engaged with antiquity in a manner that is akin in spirit to the Italian Renaissance; that engagement found expression in philosophy, music, epigraphy, calligraphy, painting, and the three-dimensional arts.

Song bronzes typically imitate the shapes of ancient bronzes, though their ornament derives from a variety sources, from ancient vessels to more recent works in other media. Even when the ornament derives solely from ancient bronzes, the decorative scheme often combines motifs from disparate periods and places. The favored motifs typically include those associated with ancient ritual vessels, such as long-tailed birds and the *taotie*, or monster, mask. Thinly cast, Yuan bronzes often feature all-over diaper patterns resembling those in the borders of contemporaneous blue-and-white porcelains; new shapes appear to serve new functions and old shapes accept modifications to fit new tastes. Non-imperial bronzes of the early Ming show a preference for surfaces with decorated areas contrasting with undecorated ones. The decoration of such Song, Yuan, and early Ming bronzes typically comprises a network of fine, thread-relief lines. Such vessels seldom bear inscriptions, and like ceramics of those periods, do not boast imperial reign marks.

Imperially commissioned bronzes from the Xuande reign (1426–1435) of the Ming dynasty apparently ranked among the most exquisite of all later bronzes, admired for their elegant shapes, sublime colors, delicate inlays, and perfect casting. Indeed, from Qing times onward, Chinese scholars and collectors have generically referred to all later bronzes as *Xuan lu* or *Xuande lu*, that is, as “Xuan censers” or “Xuande censers,” a testament to the high regard in which bronzes of that period are held. Given that porcelains, lacquers, and cloisonné enamels created during the Xuande reign are universally ranked among the finest ever produced, it comes as no surprise that bronzes from that era would embody the highest quality as well. What does come as a surprise, though, is that few Xuande bronzes have survived, a situation lamented already by late Ming connoisseurs; in fact, proportionally fewer Xuande bronzes have survived than contemporaneous ceramics, lacquers, and cloisonné enamels. Seventeenth-century copies preserve something of their innovative style and elegance, however, and reveal that they were based as much on Song ceramics as on ancient bronzes. From the few surviving examples believed to be of the period, it seems that imperially commissioned Xuande bronzes, like the related blue-and-white porcelains, typically have four- or six-character imperial reign marks reading *Xuande nian zhi* or *Da Ming Xuande nian zhi*—that is, “Made [during the] Xuande reign” or “Made [during the]

Xuande reign [of the] Great Ming.” On genuine vessels, such marks are in the same brush-written style as those on contemporaneous porcelains: they are integrally cast with the vessel, and they rise in thread relief. Given the high esteem in which Xuande-period bronzes traditionally have been held, the Xuande marks are the most widely imitated and copied of all.

Except for those with gold or silver inlays, bronzes from the Song, Yuan, and early Ming periods almost always have decoration integrally cast with the vessel itself. From the mid-Ming onward, bronzes begin to rely on cold work (chasing and chiseling after casting) for their decoration. By the late Ming, the decoration on most bronzes was imparted through cold work; and from the late Ming on, many bronzes were not cast at all, but raised, or hammered, from sheet copper. Gilding enjoyed great popularity in the late Ming, whether enlivening a full vessel or only localized areas, as did gold and silver inlay work, whether in wire, sheet metal, or both. Late Ming artisans expanded their range of sources for both shape and decoration to include contemporaneous lacquers, jades, porcelains, ivories, and cloisonné enamels; as a result, new, often playful, shapes and motifs appear, including many objects for the scholar’s desk. In the absence of reliably dated inscriptions and archaeological data, such borrowings make the comparative method especially useful for dating.

Although literary records mention numerous bronze artisans, the tradition remains largely anonymous because so few bronzes are inscribed with their place of manufacture or maker’s name. A number of bronzes bear the marks of Hu Wenming of Yunjian (present-day Songjiang, near Shanghai), who was active in the late Ming period. More bronzes bear the marks of Shisou than any other, even though his existence has not been historically documented.

Often large, Qing bronzes were cast as well as raised from sheet metal or assembled from hammered components. Although they sometimes resemble those of Ming bronzes, the decorative schemes of Qing bronzes range from archaistic to abstract, from formalistic to naturalistic and even eclectic. Bronzes of the Kangxi period (1662–1722) show a taste for a *yin-yang* pairing of complementary opposites and for abstract, gold-splashed décor derived from Xuande bronzes. Those of the Yongzheng (1723–1735) and Qianlong (1736–1795) eras reveal a preference for floral designs, archaistic dragons, and dragon-and-phoenix motifs. Popular already in the late Ming, designs wishing the viewer wealth, marital happiness, and success in the civil service examinations became even more so in the Qing. Late eighteenth-century bronzes occasionally feature asymmetrical designs that represent a radical departure from tradition, whereas nineteenth-century ones espouse a newfound economy of material, substituting overlays of gold and silver for the more costly inlays of earlier centuries. At their best, Qing bronzes show exquisitely finished surfaces unrivalled by those of other post-Tang examples. By the Qing dynasty, the characters in most reign marks are based on those in printed books rather than on those in brush-

written texts. In addition, whereas most reign marks before the mid-Ming period were integrally cast with the vessel, as was the decoration, from the sixteenth century onward many reign marks were carved into the bronze after casting.

The classical bronzes from the Shang, Zhou, and Han dynasties were cast using the piece-mold technique, a difficult and complicated process that, if mastered, yields superior results. Because the interior of the finished mold is accessible before casting, the artist can correct flaws, sharpen lines defining the ornament, and otherwise perfect the decorative scheme; thus, little post-casting work was necessary to finish the bronze vessels. By contrast, later bronzes were cast through the *cire-perdue*, or lost-wax, process, which is easier and more efficient to employ but which generally results in less precise linear designs, as the artist does not have access to the interior of the mold before casting. It is likely that the meticulously carved designs on lacquer vessels—designs with fine lines and sharp edges—sparked the desire for bronzes with decoration rendered with similar precision; since such precision could not easily be attained through lost-wax casting, the artisans doubtless turned to cold working to achieve the desired effects. A very fine and representative range of such decorative techniques may be seen and appreciated in the Saint Louis Art Museum and Robert E. Kresko collections of later Chinese bronzes.



Detail of archaistic tripod censer with cover (No. 9)



No. 1

鑲金銅碧霞元君立像

Primordial Sovereign of the Colored Clouds of Dawn

Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279), 12th–13th century

Cast bronze with traces of red and black lacquer, and gilding, with a transparent brown coating;

height 63.5 cm, width 17.8 cm

Saint Louis Art Museum, Partial and promised gift of Robert E. Kresko

2:2005

This stately figure is a representation of the Primordial Sovereign of the Colored Clouds of Dawn (Bixia yuanjun 碧霞元君), a major deity in the Daoist pantheon.¹ Her identification is based on several distinctive elements: her hair is coiffed in a double roll and decorated with a lotus bud ornament; below her widow's peak is a diamond-shaped mark on her forehead; and a magical fungus motif (*ruyi* 如意) decorates the front of her garment. With both hands she holds a sacred square seal wrapped in silk. The pointed and slightly upturned shoes that peek out from beneath her long, wide-sleeved robe are typical of those worn by women of the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127) to prevent them from tripping on their garments while walking. Her elegant attire is enhanced by long lappets trailing from the hem onto the pierced rectangular pedestal that supports her figure.

According to Daoist legend, Bixia yuanjun is the daughter of the Lord of Mount Tai (Tai shan 泰山) in Shandong province, which is the Sacred Peak of the East and the most important among the five marchmounts of China.² Her cult began in 1008 when Emperor Zhenzong 真宗 (968–1022; r. 997–1022) of the Northern Song ascended Mount Tai to perform the imperial *feng* 封 and *shan* 禪 ritual sacrifices. He was presented with a statue that had been recovered from a lake and was believed to represent the legendary Jade Maiden (Yu nü 玉女), who had been worshiped there since antiquity. The emperor ordered a shrine to be built on the mountaintop, thereby initiating the cult of Bixia yuanjun.³ Although the cult of the deity was founded in the early eleventh century, it truly flourished only during the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties. As such, pre-Ming images of the deity, as exemplified by the Kresko sculpture, are particularly rare.⁴

Like her Buddhist counterpart, the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (Guanyin pusa 觀音菩薩), this Daoist divinity was especially worshiped by women for her ability to offer protection and assistance during pregnancy and childbirth as well as to children during their infancy. Male and female devotees entrusted her with fulfilling their wishes, such as the accrual of wealth, elevation of official rank, safety during travels, success in agriculture and sericulture, assurances of happy marriages, granting of many children and descendants, assistance in winning lawsuits, and cure of illnesses and diseases.⁵ She was also believed to bestow blessings in the form of mist and rain from her celestial residence set within rainbow-colored clouds.

Technical Notes

Technical information on the bronzes was gathered visually, using Optivisors for low magnification, and a binocular microscope. Mirrors on extending handles and a flashlight were used to examine interiors. Several objects were selected as candidates for thermoluminescent dating (TL); however, adequate samples of core material could not be obtained. I am grateful to Robert Mowry and Philip Hu for their very collegial help in examining and discussing each piece. *Laura Gorman*

The figure and stand were integrally cast. Little or no cold-working was done, and casting flaws on the back of the figure were left unrepaired. The surface of the stand is especially rough. It appears that the figure was completely covered with coatings of lacquer or gold periodically, which would have undoubtedly hidden many of the casting irregularities.

Provenance

Christie's New York, 1996; Collection of Robert E. Kresko, St. Louis, 1996–2005.

Published

Christie's New York, *Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art*, Sale 8376, March 28, 1996, p. 88, lot no. 142.

¹ The deity's name in Chinese does not lend itself to easy translation. The character *bi* 碧 is used to describe a blue-green color and may be translated as "jade" or "azure"; the character *xia* 霞 refers to the rose-colored clouds of dawn (or dusk, as it is sometimes used). As a compound, *bixia* 碧霞 may be rendered literally as "the azure and rosy clouds of dawn," but I have followed Susan Naquin in translating it as "the colored clouds of dawn." See Susan Naquin, "The Peking Pilgrimage to Miao-feng Shan: Religious Organizations and Sacred Site," in Susan Naquin and Chün-fang Yü, eds., *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), p. 368, n. 4. The compound *yuanjun* 元君, literally "primordial ruler," is a term of respect used by Daoists to refer to female immortals and is translated here as "primordial sovereign." Other English translations in use, as numerous as they are diverse, include Mysterious Goddess of the Azure Cloud, Sovereign of the Clouds of Dawn, First Princess of Azure Clouds, Primordial Lady of Morning Clouds, Primordial Lady of Emerald Clouds, and Primordial Ruler of Emerald Mist.

² For more on the deity, see E. T. C. Werner, *A Dictionary of Chinese Mythology* (Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, Ltd.,

1932. Reprint. New York: The Julian Press, 1961), pp. 373–75; Pei-yi Wu, "An Ambivalent Pilgrim to T'ai-Shan in the Seventeenth Century," in Naquin and Yü, eds., *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China*, pp. 78–81; Naquin, "The Peking Pilgrimage to Miao-feng Shan," pp. 334–38; Kenneth L. Pomeranz, "Power, Gender, and Pluralism in the Cult of the Goddess of Taishan," in Theodore Hutters, R. Bin Wong, and Pauline Yu, eds., *Culture and State in Chinese History: Conventions, Accommodations, and Critiques* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 182–204; Jordan D. Paper, *Through the Earth Darkly: Female Spirituality in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Continuum, 1997), pp. 75–76; Brian R. Dott, *Identity Reflections: Pilgrimages to Mount Tai in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004), pp. 111–15, 265–67; and Kenneth L. Pomeranz, "Orthopraxy, Orthodoxy, and the Goddess(es) of Taishan," *Modern China*, vol. 33, no. 1 (January 2007), pp. 22–46.

³ She is believed to reside in the Shrine of the Primordial Sovereign of the Colored Clouds of Dawn (Bixia yuanjun ci 碧霞元君祠) at the summit of the mountain.

⁴ A Song-dynasty (960–1279) representation of the deity in stone, excavated from Jintangzhai, Fangcheng county, Henan province, and now in the Henan Museum, Zhengzhou, is illustrated in Empress Place Museum, *Urban Life in the Song, Yuan & Ming* (Singapore: Empress Place Museum, 1994), p. 50 (the figurine identified simply as "a lady with a seal"). For a fifteenth-century monumental Ming limestone head of the deity in a Canadian collection, see Royal Ontario Museum, *Homage to Heaven, Homage to Earth: Chinese Treasures of the Royal Ontario Museum* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), pp. 190–91, no. 111, The George Crofts Collection, Gift of D. A. Dunlap (921.31.24). For a bronze figure of rather different form and decoration from the Kresko piece, see Sovereign of the Clouds of Dawn, Ming dynasty, fifteenth century, bronze with traces of pigment, The Art Institute of Chicago, Gift of Mrs. Samuel G. Rautbord (1967.333), in Stephen Little with Shawn Eichman, *Taoism and the Arts of China* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, in association with Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 278–79, cat. no. 95.

⁵ See Luo Xianglin, "Miaofeng shan yu Bixia yuanjun," in Luo Xianglin, *Minsu xue luncong* [Taipei: Wenxing shudian (Book World Co.), 1966], pp. 16–17.

No. 2

鑲金銅佛獅形香爐

Covered Censer in the Form of a Lion-Dog

Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) or Ming dynasty (1368–1644), 14th century

Cast bronze with gilding, induced patina, and tinted coating; height 13.3 cm, width 14.3 cm, depth 16 cm

Saint Louis Art Museum, Partial and promised gift of Robert E. Kresko

5:2005a,b



This unusually shaped censer takes the form of a crouching lion-dog with its forelegs bent and extended outward at the same angle as its head. It has bulging eyes, heavy eyebrows, flapped ears, and wide, open jaws. Sharp claws protrude from all four limbs, adding an extra element to the appearance of ferocity. It has a shaggy mane made up of dense scrolled curls that match the other bearded and furred areas on its body. The bushy, flamelike tail sweeps upward in an energetic gesture. The upper jaw, face, and head form a fitted lid that

may be removed from the rest of the body to allow incense to be deposited through the scalloped opening into the interior cavity. When the lid is replaced, there is ample space between the upper and lower jaws for the burnt incense to escape, thereby giving the impression that the lion-dog is emanating smoke from its mouth.

As mythical guardian figures, lion-dogs have a long and colorful history in China and elsewhere in Central and East Asia.¹ They first appeared during the Western Han dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 9), when Buddhist travelers to India returned to China with descriptions of lions. But since lions were not indigenous to China, native dogs (such as the Pekingese and Shi Tzu breeds) served as models. The newly created mythical animal was pressed into service as a Buddhist protector of the Dharma, earning the name *fo gou* 佛狗 (“dog of the Buddha”).² For more than two millennia, through the end of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), lion-dogs have stood guard outside imperial palaces, temples, and tombs, as well as the homes of officials and wealthy citizens. They were traditionally made of stone (marble or granite being the most common) or cast in bronze or iron. Almost invariably, lion-dogs came in pairs, with the male on the right and female on the left. The male lion-dog is usually shown with his right paw on a globe or brocaded ball, while the female places her left paw protectively over a single cub.



Front view of the censer



View of the censer from above, with headpiece removed

One of the most compelling examples of pre-Ming incense burners in the form of lion-dogs is an elaborate porcelain pair in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The pair, where the animals are placed atop lotus pedestals, serves well as a comparison from the world of ceramics. Made during the late Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) in the early fourteenth century, the lion-dogs are shown with their heads turned to one side, bulging eyes winsomely looking out, mouths open and growling, their tightly curled manes and upturned tails resembling those on the Kresko censer.³

The Kresko censer may have been part of a larger set with the same form and construction. In May 1997, a pair of gilt bronze censers nearly identical in size and shape to each other and to the Kresko piece appeared at auction in Germany.⁴ These two lion-dogs, like their Kresko counterpart, were decidedly not made with perfect bilateral symmetry. The slightly off-center stance of each one gives it dynamism and suggests that two such censers with the lion-dogs facing inward would have worked well as a pair.

Technical Notes

This lion-dog appears to have been integrally cast, with no cold-working of the cast features. The surface is not well finished, with casting flaws left unrepaired. The areas of curly fur have been colored with a black material, while the toes and teeth have a brown patina. The lid sits on a lip on the body without a device for securing it. There is a tongue of metal which was not removed from inside the hollow tail.

Provenance

Carter Fine Art Ltd., London, until 1997; Collection of Robert E. Kresko, St. Louis, 1997–2005.

Published

The International Asian Art Fair (London: The International Asian Art Fair Ltd., 1997), p. 31 (full-page advertisement of Carter Fine Art Ltd., London).

Exhibited

“In the Shadow of Dragons: The Robert Kresko Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes,” The Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas, Texas, March 7–September 9, 2001.

¹ For a study of the lion-dog in the religious and decorative arts of China, Tibet, and Japan, see Elsie P. Mitchell, *The Lion-Dog of Buddhist Asia* (New York and Renens, Switzerland: Fugaisha, 1991).

² In modern times, however, lion-dogs are better known as *shizi gou* 獅子狗 (“lion-dog”), *rui shi* 瑞獅 (“auspicious lion”), or *fu gou* 福狗 (“lucky dog”) in Chinese; the terms *fo gou* and *fu gou* were later popularized in the West as “fu dog” or “foo dog.”

³ Probably Jingdezhen ware; porcelain with brown, low-relief, and full-relief decoration under bluish-white (*qingbai*) glaze, Fletcher Fund, 1934 (34.113.2 and 34.113.3). See Suzanne G. Valenstein, *A Handbook of Chinese Ceramics*, rev. and enl. ed. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), p. 128, nos. 121–22; and Stacey Pierson, ed., *Qingbai Ware: Chinese Porcelain of the Song and Yuan Dynasties* (London: Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2002), pp. 204–205, cat. no. 115.

⁴ Yuan or Ming dynasty, fourteenth century; see Kunsthau Lempertz, Cologne, *Ostasiatische Kunst*, Sale 743, May 30–31, 1997, lot no. 222 (with color illustration on front cover).



No. 3

鑲金銅羅漢坐像

Seated Figure of an Arhat

Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) or Ming dynasty (1368–1644), 14th–15th century

Cast bronze with gilding and traces of other coatings; height 50.8 cm, width 30.5 cm

Saint Louis Art Museum, Partial and promised gift of Robert E. Kresko

3:2005

This sculpture depicts an arhat seated on a flat round base. The Sanskrit term *arhat* literally means “worthy one” and refers to the highest grade of noble persons as described in the Pali canon of Theravada Buddhism; it came to be used as an epithet for the Buddha as well as his legendary enlightened disciples. Although these disciples had also attained enlightenment, they were commanded by the Buddha to remain on earth until the coming of Maitreya, the Future Buddha; they are known for their wisdom, courage, and supernatural powers. The head and torso of the Kresko arhat are frontally oriented and strictly symmetrical, while the arms and the legs are asymmetrically positioned. Both of the arhat’s legs are shown bent at the knee, the left resting on the base while the right is pulled up to the level of the waist. His feet are exposed against the long, flowing robes and the chest left bare above tied aprons and skirts, all with floral borders. The neck and the chest are rendered with diagonal lines to suggest a bony, emaciated appearance, though the face itself is rather full, framed by large ears with long lobes. The figure’s eyes are closed in meditation and the expression conveys quiet serenity. What gives the face its most distinctive character are the tight curls of the forehead, eyebrows, moustache, goatee, and beard; similar curls may also be seen at the back of the head in the hair. Placed on the head to hold back the carefully combed hair is a simple diadem whose curled ends meet in front at the center. A necklace, whose simple design matches the diadem, adorns the otherwise bare chest. The arhat is shown holding with both hands a *sūtra* scroll, which is fastened with a ribbon. Much of the gilding has worn off, but there are traces of polychromy, including red on the lips and blue in the hair. There are no reign marks, maker’s marks, or inscriptions on the object.

The *sūtra* scroll is presented with the lower end supported by the palm of the arhat’s left hand and the upper end delicately poised between three fingers of his right hand. This particular positioning of the hands holding an object is extremely unusual among known representations of arhats.¹ It does, however, occur in Daoist iconography as manifested in pictorial and sculptural forms.² By the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127), the Three Purities of Daoism had already been incorporated into certain Buddhist rituals. As such, this sculpture subtly reflects the iconographic results of religious syncretism in late Yuan or early Ming China. The simple diadem, with curled ends nearly meeting above the center of the arhat’s forehead, is a distinctively post-Tang feature in Chinese Buddhist sculpture; it may be seen in figures from the Jin dynasty (1115–1234), Southern Song (1127–1279), and subsequent periods.³ Such diadems were later adopted and elaborated upon in Daoist



Fig. 1: Śākyamuni as an Ascetic; Yuan dynasty (1279–1368), early 14th century; gilt bronze; height 44.2 cm, width 31.8 cm; ©The Cleveland Museum of Art, Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund (1966.116).

sculpture during the sixteenth century.⁴ The Kresko sculpture has been tentatively dated to the fourteenth or fifteenth century, which allows for the possibility that it was made during the later half of the Yuan dynasty. If it were indeed of Yuan date, it is likely to have been made toward the end of the reign, that is, mid-fourteenth century at the earliest.

The enigmatic Kresko piece exhibits a rare style that is in fact a highly sophisticated combination of Indian, Kashmiri, Nepalese, Tibetan, and Chinese modes of sculptural representation from various periods, but at the same time demonstrating clear signs of Chinese craftsmanship. In terms of overall form and size, the closest comparison to the Kresko piece is a well-known gilt bronze sculpture in the Cleveland Museum

of Art, where the figure is shown seated on a pedestal with fine floral decoration, his left knee raised to the chest, both hands folded over the knee, and his eyes closed in contemplation (Fig. 1).⁵ The tight curls on the forehead, brows, and beard give the figure a distinctive style not seen in images of this type before the fourteenth century. This hollow cast work decorated with chased ornaments has, for the most part, been identified as the Śākyamuni Buddha as an ascetic and as a product of the early fourteenth century. As such, it has long served as an important stylistic benchmark for late Yuan Buddhist sculpture. However, Ulrich von Schroeder, a noted Swiss scholar of Buddhist art, has proposed that the Cleveland sculpture may in fact be from the early Ming period, while still falling within the fourteenth century, in addition to identifying it as a representation of Siddhārtha.⁶ The other related figure, made in the late fourteenth century, is a small image of the arhat Bhadra (in Chinese, Batuoluo 跋陀羅) in the Musée national des Arts Asiatiques—Guimet, Paris.⁷ That early Ming arhat is seated in the lotus position, with his hands at chest level making gestures; a considerably more Chinese style may be seen in the rounder face and the folds of the robe. The Kresko arhat appears to fall somewhere in between these two objects in terms of its possible date of production. All things considered, it is closer to the Cleveland piece, and therefore it is quite likely to have been made in the early Ming during the Hongwu reign period (1368–1398).⁸

Technical Notes

The sculpture shows remnants of previous coatings; layers include gold on a substrate, gold with a transparent red varnish, red, black, and off-white. There is powdery blue pigment in the curls of the hair. A series of vertical parallel scratches can be seen in the gilded areas of the flesh including the feet, as though someone attempted to remove the gold layer.

The bronze surface is crudely cast and finished, perhaps because it was covered by coatings. Tool marks and casting flaws are evident throughout. There is a large loss on the back of the figure, which has been filled in spots with white metal. Many holes in the piece are due to flaws, but others are intentional: a square hole and a circular hole on the center of the back, a circular hole on the lower proper right side, a square hole on the calf of the proper right leg, and square and circular holes on the proper left leg.

Three square iron pins project into the interior of the sculpture: one from each shoulder, and one from just above the bow at the waist; these can be seen on the exterior. It is likely that the open square holes noted above also had iron pins that were removed. There is a flange of metal on the interior where the head meets the body. On the exterior, a sharp line under the chin, with some excess metal, suggests that the head could have been attached or cast onto the body. The floral pattern on the border of the robe lacks fluidity and appears to be cold-worked.

Provenance

Christie's London, 1997; Ralph M. Chait Galleries, 1997–2000; Collection of Robert E. Kresko, St. Louis, 2000–2005.

Published

Christie's London, *Fine Chinese Ceramics, Paintings and Works of Art*, Sale 5802, June 9, 1997, p. 183, lot no. 259.

Exhibited

"In the Shadow of Dragons: The Robert Kresko Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes," The Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas, Texas, March 7–September 9, 2001.

¹ One of the only other known bronze figures of a seated arhat holding a *sūtra* with both hands is the Arhat Gopala Holding a Book, Ming, late fifteenth century, gilt bronze, Victoria and Albert Museum, London (FE.104–1970), in Rose Kerr, ed., *Chinese Art and Design: The T. T. Tsui Gallery of Chinese Art* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1991), p. 103, no. 39.

² See, for instance, a gilt bronze Yuan seated figure of the deity, in Christie's Hong Kong, *Important Chinese Works of Art*, Sale 2207 and 2209, November 28–29, 2005, pp. 160–61, lot no. 1608; a Ming, sixteenth-century figure of the same deity, in Sotheby's New York, *The Arts of the Buddha*, Sale No8147, September 22,

2005, pp. 98–99, lot no. 42; and the anonymous *Celestial Worthy of Numinous Treasure*, Qing, late seventeenth to eighteenth century, hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, White Cloud Monastery, Beijing, in Stephen L. Little with Shawn Eichman, *Taoism and the Arts of China* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, in association with Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 228–31, cat. no. 66.

³ See the diadem on a gilt bronze figure of the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, Southern Song, National Palace Museum, Taipei, in Guoli gugong bowu yuan (National Palace Museum), *Jintong fo zaoxiang tezhan tulu (The Crucible of Compassion and Wisdom: Special Exhibition Catalog of the Buddhist Bronzes from the Nitta Group Collection at the National Palace Museum)* [Taipei: Guoli gugong bowu yuan (National Palace Museum), 1987], p. 199, pl. 103; and the diadem on a Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, late Jin, Yuan, or early Ming, gilt bronze, The British Museum, London, Oppenheim Bequest, in W. Zwalf, ed., *Buddhism: Art and Faith* (London: Published by British Museum Publications Limited for the Trustees of the British Museum and the British Library Board, 1985), p. 207, cat. no. 298.

⁴ See a pair of sixteenth-century Ming figures of Daoist deities in Sotheby's New York, *The Arts of the Buddha*, Sale No8147, September 22, 2005, pp. 98–99, lot no. 42.

⁵ Śākyamuni as an Ascetic, Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund (1966.116), in David Snellgrove, ed., *The Image of the Buddha* [Tokyo and New York: Kodansha International Ltd.; Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 1978], p. 374, pl. 297.

⁶ See Ulrich von Schroeder, *Indo-Tibetan Bronzes* (Hong Kong: Visual Dharma Publications, Ltd., 1981), pp. 514–15, fig. 143E. For a Ming adaptation of this subject and pose in a small seated figure formerly in the collection of Warren Cox, Śākyamuni as pre-Buddhahood ascetic, fifteenth or sixteenth century, bronze, in Hugo Munsterberg, *Chinese Buddhist Bronzes* (Rutland, Vt. and Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1967), pp. 129–30, and p. 160, pl. 122.

⁷ Ming dynasty, c.1380–1400, gilt bronze (MG 9729); see Gilles Béguin, ed., *Dieux et démons de l'Himalaya: Art du bouddhisme lamaïque* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, Paris, 1977), cat. no. 68; and Schroeder, *Indo-Tibetan Bronzes*, pp. 514–15, fig. 143C.

⁸ See also A. & J. Spielman, *Chinese Sculpture and Works of Art* (London: A. & J. Spielman, 2002): a Bodhisattva on a mythical animal, Yuan or Ming, fourteenth century, gilt bronze, pp. 22–23, cat. no. 8; a seated Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, Yuan or Ming, fourteenth century, gilt bronze, pp. 24–25, cat. no. 9; and a seated Bodhidharma, Ming, dated 1496, parcel-gilt bronze, pp. 28–29, cat. no. 11.



No. 4

銅高足雙環獸耳長頸供瓶

Altar Vase with Animal-Head Loop Handles and Quatrefoil Rings

Ming dynasty (1368–1644), Hongzhi period (1488–1505), dated 1494

Cast bronze with induced surface color; height 55.9 cm, width 35.6 cm

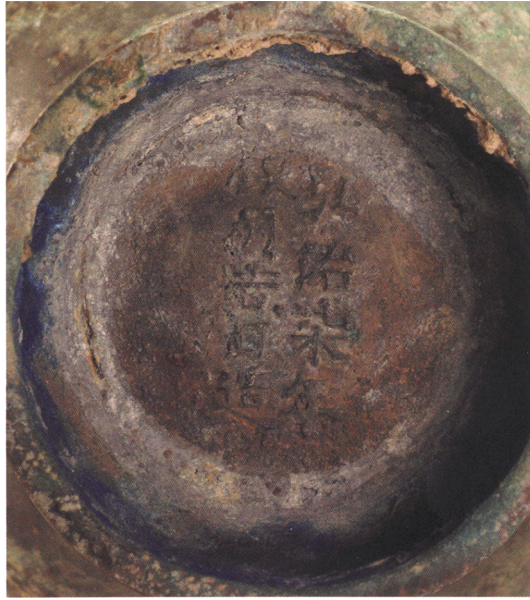
Saint Louis Art Museum, Partial and promised gift of Robert E. Kresko

16:2005

This striking vase has a voluptuous pear-shaped body on a sturdy, tall, splayed foot and a long, slender neck that trumpets into a dished opening. The mouth and foot are flared upward and downward respectively, and both are stepped at the extremities. This mirroring of form and line imbues the vessel with a sense of visual grace and stability. Issuing from the narrowest point of the neck are two mythical animal heads, from whose open jaws square-sectioned loop handles emerge and curve down to the sloping shoulders of the vase. The animal heads are very well modeled and detailed, with deep-set eyes, bushy brows, pointed noses, leaf-shaped ears, tightly curled manes, and hornlike projections that point up toward the top of the vase. The clean and elegant lines of the vase's silhouette and the sculptural animal-head loop handles are further embellished by the presence of free and movable rings, one suspended from each of the handles. These rings are quatrefoil in shape and square in cross-section, matching the part of the loop from which each one hangs. The positions of the loop handles and the rings are such that the vase commands attention regardless of the direction or angle from which it is viewed. An attractive mottled green patina covers certain areas of the vase, which was probably cleaned after retrieval from burial as attested by soil accretions that remain in place on interior surfaces.

There is a nine-character inscription on the deep recessed base, cast in relief in two columns of regular script; it reads *Hongzhi qi nian qiu yue ji ri zao* 弘治柒年秋月吉日造 (“Made on an auspicious day during an autumn month in the seventh year of the Hongzhi era”). The date given corresponds to 1494, and it represents one of the rare instances where a later Chinese bronze object can be traced to such a precise moment in history. Very few bronzes from the early Ming period are dated in this way; even those with a genuine reign mark covering a certain span of years are rare.

The imposing size of the vessel indicates its function as an altar vase. Such vessels were usually made in pairs and were often part of larger sets comprising a censer and perhaps also a pair of candleholders. To be sure, bronzes of such high quality were used on altars in prominent temples and family shrines of important people, but they may also be found within elite burial contexts, as was likely the situation with the present piece.¹ Therefore, it may be assumed that the Kresko altar vase was commissioned by, or presented to, an individual or family of considerable social stature and economic means.



View of inscription on the vase's base



Detail of vase's loop handles and quatrefoil rings

In terms of size and date, the present piece is related to a blue-and-white porcelain temple vase of baluster form with animal mask loop handles in the Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, London. Also from the Hongzhi period and dated by inscription to 1496, it measures an impressive 62.6 cm in height.² Just as the David vase is an important marker in the chronological development of Ming and Qing porcelain forms and decoration, the Kresko vase may be regarded as its counterpart in the study of later Chinese bronzes.

The vase's overall form derives from an archaic, Han-dynasty bronze vessel type (*hu* 壺) for storing wine. By the twelfth century, the form had evolved into the much more attractive pear- or baluster-shaped body on a tall foot with loop handles and swinging rings. However, bronzes of this type from the Jin dynasty (1115–1234) through the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) and into the early Ming, that is, from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, were produced with such consistency and high quality that it is very difficult to pinpoint a specific dynasty, not to mention a specific reign period.³

The addition of the principal decorative elements of this vase type, namely the loop handles and the movable rings, closely allies it to ceramic forms of the Southern Song and Yuan dynasties. In addition to the *qingbai*-glazed ceramic examples, it should be noted that Longquan celadon and Jingdezhen porcelain kilns were also known for producing vases with this kind of shape and decoration and that this continued through the Ming and into the early Qing dynasties.

There are many surviving bronze vases similar to the Kresko piece from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, but most of them are not dated by inscription. The shape of this vase type was evidently much admired by non-Chinese as well, for considerable numbers appear to have been exported via trade to Japan and Western European countries. Many have circulated in the art market and some are now in public collections.⁴ For example, the Museo d'Arte Cinese ed Etnografico in Parma, Italy, has a vase of very similar form and decoration in its collection.⁵ It has animal-head handles, quatrefoil movable rings, shorter and less pronounced foot and mouth rims, and is considerably smaller in size. Said to have come from Henan province and acquired by the museum in 1936, the vase has been published as a Southern Song object, but it is clearly contemporaneous with the Kresko piece and must also date to the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century.

Technical Notes

X-rays would be needed to confirm the fabrication of the vase, but it appears the body was integrally cast. No seams are visible on the rings, indicating that they were inserted when the cast handles were attached. There are tool marks around the handles, but no solder is visible. The base was inserted (gray solder is visible) and has a cast inscription. The corrosion on the vase is genuine.

Provenance

Kaikodo Ltd., Kamakura, Japan, until 1995; Collection of Robert E. Kresko, St. Louis, 1995–2005.

Exhibited

"In the Shadow of Dragons: The Robert Kresko Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes," The Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas, Texas, March 7–September 9, 2001.

¹ Cases in point are a censer and a pair of vases of similar form to the Kresko vase and probably from the late fifteenth or very early sixteenth century found in situ on an elaborate altar in a nobleman's tomb (Tomb No. 6 at Chengdu, Sichuan), which was closed in 1510 during the early Zhengde period (1506–1521). The vases are only about half the height of the Kresko piece. See *Wenwu cankao ziliao*, no. 10 (1956), pp. 42–49; and Rose Kerr, "The Evolution of Bronze Style in the Jin, Yuan, and Early Ming Dynasties," *Oriental Art*, n.s. vol. 28, no. 2 (Summer 1982), pp. 156–58, figs. 20–21.

² Margaret Medley, *Illustrated Catalogue of Porcelains Decorated in Underglaze Blue and Copper Red in the Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art: Section 3* (London: Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, 1963), no. PDF 680.

³ See, for instance, a pair of bronze vases of baluster shape with swing-ring handles, Jin through Yuan, and a single piece of the same type and period, Michael L. Eveleigh, *Later Chinese Bronzes: A Special Exhibition of 14th to 18th Century Examples, May 16th–19th, 1984, at the International Asian Antiques Fair, Furama Hotel, Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Andamans East International Ltd., 1984), cat. no. 1 and cat. no. 2; a long-necked cast bronze vase, with cast decoration, in the Phoenix Art Museum, Robert D. Mowry, *China's Renaissance in Bronze: The Robert H. Clague Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes, 1100–1900* (Phoenix, Ariz.: Phoenix Art Museum, 1993), pp. 40–43, cat. no. 6; and two bronze vases in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Song through Ming, in Rose Kerr, *Later Chinese Bronzes* (London: Bamboo Publishing Ltd., in association with London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1990), p. 25, pl. 14 (left), and p. 40, pl. 27 (center).

⁴ For a bronze vase of pear shape and oval section with galleried mouth and circular handles, Yuan or Ming, fourteenth century, see Eveleigh, *Later Chinese Bronzes*, cat. no. 5. For three bronze altar vases in the Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas in Madrid, Spain, see Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, *Bronces arcaicos del Museo de Shanghai: Festines, rituales y ceremonias* (Barcelona: Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, 2004), p. 68, fig. 2 (Yuan or Ming, fourteenth to fifteenth century), p. 69, fig. 3 (top and bottom, both vases early fifteenth century). For an early fifteenth-century bronze vase in the Victoria and Albert Museum, see Kerr, "The Evolution of Bronze Style in the Jin, Yuan and Early Ming Dynasties," p. 157, fig. 22.

⁵ Bronze vase, published in Giuseppe M. Toscano, *Arte e cultura cinese* (Parma, Italy: Artegrafica Silva, 1984), p. 47, fig. 47. It is described in this catalogue as "late Song" and as having "unicorn handles."



No. 5

雲龍紋銅投壺

Arrow Vase with Design of Dragons amidst Clouds

Ming dynasty (1368–1644), Zhengde period (1506–1521) through Wanli period (1573–1619), 16th century

Cast bronze with cast decoration and mark, with a pigmented coating; height 60.6 cm, width 29.2 cm

Saint Louis Art Museum, Partial and promised gift of Robert E. Kresko

15:2005

This imposing bronze vessel is an arrow vase (*touhu* 投壺). It has an eight-sectioned, globular body supported on a tall flaring octagonal foot with a raised foot ring. The unusually long neck is cylindrical for the most part except near the mouth, where it takes on an octagonal form. At this point it is flanked on either side by short open-ended appendages of similar cross-section. The extended neck and triple openings are identifying characteristics of arrow vases. The neck of this vase is dramatically decorated in high relief with two sinuous four-clawed dragons pursuing a flaming pearl above mountains, waves, and clouds. Each outward-facing panel of the body is decorated with a dragon in high relief, and the sections are separated from each other by partially openwork flanges in the form of stylized clouds. The shoulder and lower belly sections are divided by long serrated leaf blades, and the intervening spaces are decorated with clouds in the form of *ruyi*-scepter heads. The foot is embellished with mythological animals resembling *qilin* 麒麟 or “sea horses” (*haima* 海馬) prancing above waves with a band of “thunder pattern” (*leiwen* 雷紋) at the top of the register. The exterior of the raised foot rim is adorned at each of the eight points by a monster head. The overall patina on the vessel is dark gray. Cast into the center of the recessed base is a glyph (or perhaps two characters) that remains undeciphered.

In addition to the liveliness of the dragons that decorate the exterior of the arrow vase, the elegantly grouped *ruyi*-shaped clouds on the upper and lower segmented bands of the body are nearly identical to those found on sixteenth-century porcelains from the Zhengde through the Wanli reigns. The very distinctive cloud design consists of a central group of *ruyi*-heads, with gently curled tails extending outward to the left and right. These are augmented by *ruyi*-headed clouds at the top and bottom, their tails pointing in opposite directions.¹ There are a number of extant Ming arrow vases whose overall dimensions, form (e.g., compressed globular body with tall neck), and decoration (e.g., vertical flanges on the body and coiled dragons on the neck) are comparable to the Kresko piece.² Based on these observations, a sixteenth-century date may be confidently assigned to the Kresko vessel.

The arrow vase is associated with a very ancient game known in Chinese as *touhu* 投壺 (variously translated as “pitch pot” or “arrow throwing”). It was played during or after banquets and drinking gatherings. Contestants aimed short and feathered wooden arrows

(usually made from mulberry or jujube, including the bark) into one of the three openings at the top of the container. In addition to the arrows and vase, there would also be counters and containers for holding them. Twenty-four arrows usually made up a complete set, twelve each for two players or eight each for three players. Higher points were awarded for arrows thrown into the two side openings, which was presumably more difficult than aiming for the central receptacle. The loser of each round was made to drink a cup of wine, and as the game progressed, the participants got increasingly inebriated and accurate aims became ever more elusive.

The game was mentioned in early classical Chinese texts, including the *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan* 《春秋左傳》 (Zuo's Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals), traditionally attributed to Zuoqiu Ming 左丘明 (c. 556–451 B.C.). In the commentary, there is a description of a state banquet given by the marquis of Jin in honor of the marquis of Qi, who was entertained by an arrow-throwing match. The game was complex and demanded great attention to proper Confucian etiquette and ritual, especially in the relationship between younger contestants and senior players. The rules and etiquette of the game are also set down in considerable detail in chapter 37 (or 40, depending on the edition) of the *Li ji* 《禮記》 (Book of Rites), one of the principal Confucian classics compiled during the Zhou dynasty (c. 1050–221 B.C.).

Arrow vases first appeared in ceramic form but later came to be made in bronze, whose weightiness was clearly more suitable for the purpose. There are extant examples of arrow vases from the Tang dynasty onward. In 1072, the great Northern Song statesman and historian Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086) wrote a short treatise on the game, the *Touhu xin'ge* 《投壺新格》 (New Regulations for Touhu). This influential text preserved interest



View of cipher on the bottom of the arrow vase

in the game within literati circles for many centuries to follow. From the eleventh century onward, the game of *touhu* often appeared in paintings associated with, or depicting, members of the scholar-literati class.

According to Ka Bo Tsang, arrow vases of the Song dynasty usually measured “one *chi* (30.72 cm) in height and three *cun* in diameter at the mouth (1 *cun* is one-tenth of a *chi*, or 3.072 cm), while each of the two pierced ears was one *cun* in diameter.”³ They would become considerably larger during the Yuan, when the game was very popular. This increase in size is reflected in the Kresko vessel, which at 60.6 cm is twice as tall as the standard Song type; the additional decoration needed to embellish larger surfaces can also be seen here. Under Mongol rule, the popularity of the game extended beyond China; a small early fourteenth-century bronze *touhu* was recovered in 1976 from the wreckage of a Yuan ship that had been destined for Japan but sank off the coast of Korea in 1325.⁴

The game of *touhu* must have undergone a major revival in the sixteenth century during the middle of the Ming dynasty, for a large number of extant arrow vases may be dated to that period. Tall arrow vases with segmented and relief designs similar to the Kresko piece were illustrated, along with arrow-pitching techniques, in the *Touhu yijie* 《投壺儀節》 (Ceremonial Usages and Rules of Touhu) compiled by Wang Ti 汪禔 (1490–1530) in the early sixteenth century.⁵ In addition, the most important Ming illustrated encyclopedia, the early seventeenth-century *San cai tu hui* 《三才圖會》 (Collected Illustrations of the Three Realms), depicts no fewer than twenty designs of arrow vases.⁶ The vessels, represented as line drawings, are used to discuss the nomenclature associated with various possible throws and landing positions of arrows during the course of a game, but they also illustrate the great range of sixteenth-century styles that had become well established by the early Wanli period (Fig. 2). The majority of the arrow vases have globular bodies supported on pedestal feet and tall cylindrical necks whose openings are flanked by two smaller open-ended cylinders. Various design elements that characterize the Kresko piece may be found in the drawings—splayed pedestal feet (seventeen out of the twenty), vertical flanges projecting from the body (five of twenty), shoulders and/or lower belly divided into panels (three of twenty), dragons or other animals encircling the neck (three of twenty), and partial or complete patterning of cylinders at the top of the vases (all twenty).

As a woodblock-printed encyclopedia, the *San cai tu hui* was widely available during the late Ming period, and its enormous popularity extended well into the Qing dynasty. It would be safe to say that many post-sixteenth-century designs of bronze arrow vases are likely indebted in one way or another to the illustrations found in this magisterial work.⁷ Even arrow vases that were made of other materials, such as cloisonné enamel or cast iron, relied to a great degree on bronze shapes.⁸

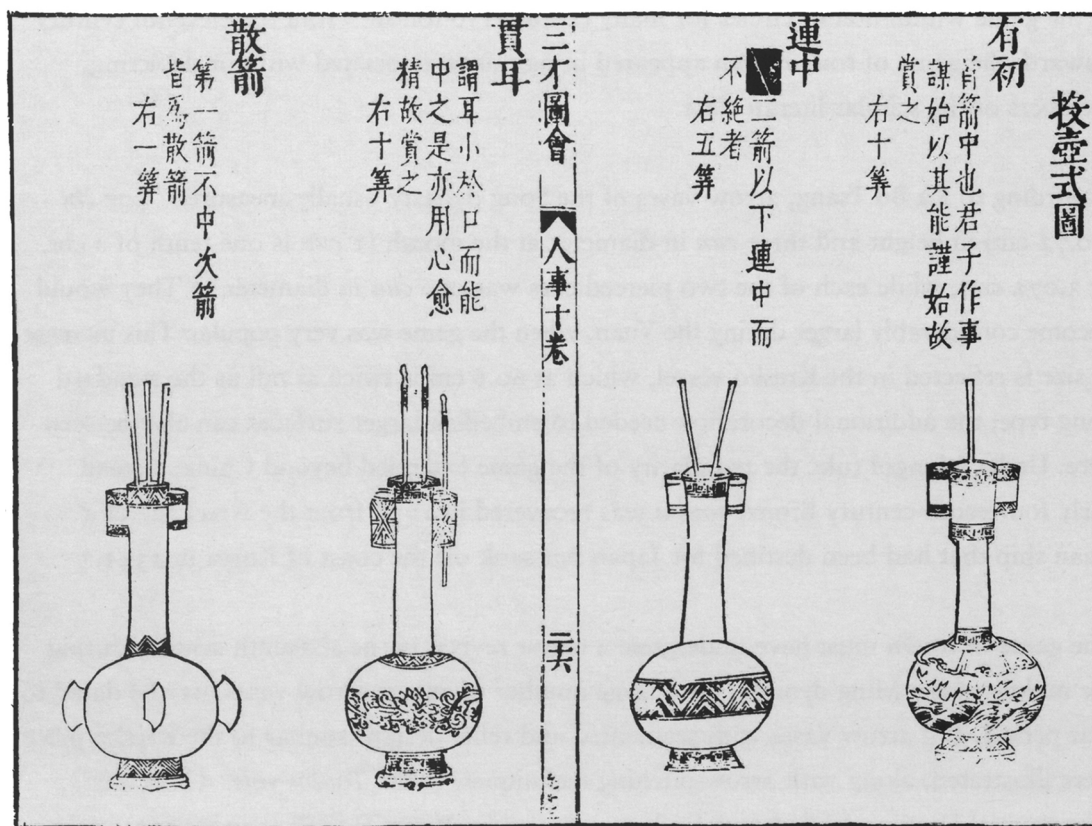


Fig. 2: Four designs of arrow vases (*toubu*), from a group of twenty, illustrated in Wang Qi and Wang Siyi, comps., *San cai tu hui* (Collected Illustrations of the Three Realms) (106 *juan*), completed 1607, first published 1609, Renshi ("Human Affairs") section, *juan* 10, folio 26a–b.

Technical Notes

The heavy coating on this vase obscures details of fabrication; however, as far as can be determined, the body was integrally cast with a separate plate soldered into place for the base. The two side targets were cast separately and attached to the neck; both have numerous cracks and repairs. As can be seen inside the foot, the cast metal is quite spongy in areas. There are no discernible tool marks around the undeciphered mark on the bottom of the vase, suggesting that it was cast.

Provenance

Brian Harkins Oriental Art, London, 1990–1994; Carter Fine Art, Ltd., London, 1994; Robert E. Kresko, St. Louis, 1994–2005.

Exhibited

"In the Shadow of Dragons: The Robert Kresko Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes," The Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas, Texas, March 7–September 9, 2001.

¹ See, for instance, the upper band of *ruyi* clouds on a Ming-dynasty barrel-shaped stool, Zhengde period (1506–1521) or Jiajing period (1522–1566), porcelain with *fabua*-type decoration, British Museum, London, Franks Collection (OA F.194+), in Jessica Harrison-Hall, *Catalogue of Late Yuan and Ming Ceramics in the British Museum* (London: The British Museum Press, 2001), p. 425, cat. no. 13:32; and another similar stool from the Jiajing period (1522–1566), *ibid.*, p. 426, cat. no. 13:34.

² See, for instance, a fifteenth- to sixteenth-century *toubu* whose body is applied in high relief with dragon masks alternating with four tubes, the shoulder with Buddhist lion-dogs and brocaded balls, the tall neck with the "Eight Immortals" below four further tubes counterwise to those on the body, and an early sixteenth-century parcel-gilt bronze *toubu* with a globular body incised and reserved in gilt with Buddhist lion-dogs and *qilin* between the raised vertical flanges, and a tall neck with a *chi*-dragon encircling it below the *taotie* masks on the cylindrical tubes at the top. The

two vessels were published in Michael L. Eveleigh, *Later Chinese Bronzes: A Special Exhibition of 14th to 18th Century Examples, May 16th–19th, 1984, at the International Asian Antiques Fair, Furama Hotel, Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Andamans East International Ltd., 1984), cat. nos. 23 and 25.

³ Ka Bo Tsang, “Touhu: An Ancient Chinese Game,” *Rotunda: The Magazine of the Royal Ontario Museum*, vol. 17, no. 3 (Fall–Winter 1984–1985), p. 24. Tsang also observes that “a Ming dynasty (1368–1644) pot has been known to be as tall as seven *chi*.” However, such a monumental arrow vase, exceeding two meters in height and not easily portable, would have been the exception rather than the rule.

⁴ This *touhu* is of a much more rudimentary design than the Kresko vase; it does not have segmented panels, flanges, or relief decoration. See Bureau of Cultural Properties, Ministry of Culture and Information, Seoul, Republic of Korea, comp., *Relics Salvaged from the Seabed off Sinan: Materials I* (Seoul: Dong Hwa Publishing Co., 1985), p. 188, pl. 176, no. 255.

⁵ See Isabelle Lee, “Touhu: Three Millennia of the Chinese Arrow Vase and the Game of Pitch-Pot,” *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society*, vol. 56 (1991–1992), p. 22, figs. 7 and 8.

⁶ See the *Renshi* 人事 (“Human Affairs”) section, *juan* 10, folios 26a–30b of Wang Qi and Wang Siyi, comps., *San cai tu hui* (106 *juan*), completed 1607, first published 1609; reprint ed. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1988), vol. 2, pp. 1785–87.

⁷ For a sixteenth-century Ming bronze arrow vase of hexagonal section, see Michael Goedhuis, *Chinese and Japanese Bronzes, A.D. 1100–1900* (London: Colnaghi Oriental, 1989), cat. no. 53. For a late sixteenth- to early seventeenth-century bronze arrow vase, in the Robert H. Clague Collection, Phoenix Art Museum, see Robert D. Mowry, *China’s Renaissance in Bronze: The Robert H. Clague Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes, 1100–1900* (Phoenix, Ariz.: Phoenix Art Museum, 1993), pp. 52–55, cat. no. 9. For a late Ming, early seventeenth-century bronze *touhu* vessel with *chi*-dragon decoration in the Shanghai Museum, see Chu-ting Li and James C. Y. Watt, eds., *The Chinese Scholar’s Studio: Artistic Life in the Late Ming Period: An Exhibition from the Shanghai Museum* (New York: Thames and Hudson, Inc., in association with New York: The Asia Society Galleries, 1987), p. 119, cat. no. 63, and p. 178, cat. no. 63. For two other Ming arrow vases formerly in the collection of Berthold Laufer (1874–1934), see Oskar Münsterberg, *Chinesische Kunstgeschichte* (Esslingen a. N., Germany: Paul Neff Verlag [Max Schreiber], 1910–1912. Reprint [2nd unabridged ed.]. Esslingen a. N., Germany: Paul Neff Verlag [Max Schreiber],

1924), Bd. 2, p. 136, Abb. 219. Qing examples ranging from small to very large include the following: a bronze *touhu* with splashed gold decoration, formerly in the collection R. Soame Jenyns (1904–1976), Bottisham, Cambridgeshire, England, Qianlong period, in R. Soame Jenyns and William Watson, *Chinese Art II: Gold, Silver, Later Bronzes, Cloisonné, Cantonese Enamel, Lacquer, Furniture, Wood*, rev. ed. (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1980), p. 100, no. 67, and p. 100, pl. 67; a large bronze pitch pot in the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, illustrated in Tsang, “Touhu: An Ancient Chinese Game,” p. 24; and a very fine Qianlong-period bronze *touhu* in the Palace Museum, Beijing, with a poem composed by the Qianlong emperor on the game cast around the neck’s midsection and accompanied by arrows, in *Cixi taihou: Shenghuo yishu (Empress Dowager Cixi: Her Art of Living)*, jointly presented by the Xianggang quyue shizheng ju (Regional Council, Hong Kong) and the Beijing gugong bowu yuan (Palace Museum, Beijing) [Hong Kong: Xianggang quyue shizheng ju (Regional Council, Hong Kong); Beijing: Beijing gugong bowu yuan (Palace Museum, Beijing), 1996], p. 86 (top).

⁸ For an early fifteenth-century Ming arrow vase in cloisonné enamel, see The Oriental Art Gallery Limited, *Oriental Works of Art: Opening Tuesday, 8th June 1993* (London: The Oriental Art Gallery Limited, 1993), cat. no. 68. Ming *touhu* in cast iron examples include a sixteenth-century piece in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, illustrated in Rose Kerr, *Later Chinese Bronzes* (London: Bamboo Publishing Ltd., in association with London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1990), p. 48, pl. 39, and in Virginia Bower and Colin Mackenzie, “Pitchpot: The Scholar’s Arrow-Throwing Game,” in Colin Mackenzie and Irving Finkel, eds., *Asian Games: The Art of Contest* (New York: Asia Society, 2004), p. 279, fig. 215; and a Wanli-period white cast iron arrow vase in the British Museum, with stylized flowering stem and bird cast on the neck, dated by a six-character inscription to 1579, illustrated in Sotheby’s London, *Catalogue of Chinese Decorative Arts*, October 29, 1982, pp. 64–65, lot no. 156, and in Paul T. Craddock et al., “Chinese Cast Iron through Twenty-Five Hundred Years,” in Paul Jett with Janet G. Douglas, eds., *Scientific Research in the Field of Asian Art: Proceedings of the First Forbes Symposium at the Freer Gallery of Art* (London: Archetype Publications Ltd., in association with Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, 2003), p. 37, fig. 2. For a nineteenth-century cast iron *touhu*, formerly in the Nagatani Collection, Chicago, see Robert Poor, “Evolution of a Secular Vessel Type,” *Oriental Art*, n.s., vol. 14, no. 2 (Summer 1968), p. 103, fig. 9.

No. 6

錯金銀銅獬形尊

Vessel in the Form of a Tapir

Ming dynasty (1368–1644), 16th–early 17th century

Cast bronze with inlaid gilded copper and silver, with induced patina and artificial corrosion;

height 20.3 cm, width 10 cm, depth 20.3 cm

Saint Louis Art Museum, Partial and promised gift of Robert E. Kresko

14:2005

This vessel takes the form of a quadruped whose head is held high, with gilded eyes that gaze slightly upward. The pointed ears are pricked, imparting a sense of alertness. It appears to be wearing a raised collar with geometric designs, while its solidly built body is decorated with a number of scrolled and swirling patterns in low relief. Viewed from the rear, the animal's tail curves to the right. There is a round opening in its back, covered by a hinged lid with a T-shaped handle. Aside from the legs and parts of the head, neck, and rump that are left plain, the rest of the animal is profusely decorated with inlaid gilded copper and silver. The induced dark brown patina is enhanced by artificial corrosion in the form of red and black waxes. Many similar later Chinese bronze vessels have small openings in the animal's mouth, from which liquids such as wine or water could be poured out, though they were often simply displayed as works of art.¹ Since this piece does not have a mouth opening, it must have been made for the sole purpose of decoration.

In the terminology of Chinese bronzes, objects of this form have long been known as *xi zun* 犧尊, the first character of the compound referring to a mythical bovine animal but usually translated as “rhinoceros” (*xiniu* 犧牛, which may also be written as *xiniu* 犀牛). Although the Chinese term *xi zun* literally means “wine vessel in the form of a rhinoceros,” it has been used very broadly to include a variety of animal shapes, including those only remotely resembling a rhinoceros. Because such vessels were routinely called *xi zun*, the animal represented would be inadvertently (and incorrectly) identified as a rhinoceros. The ancient Chinese certainly knew what a rhinoceros looked like, judging from bronzes from the Shang through the Han that accurately convey the animal's physiognomy. This is evident in the well-known late Shang-dynasty inscribed bronze *zun* in the form of a rhinoceros at the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco.² The form of a rhinoceros can also be seen in a magnificent *zun* from the National Museum of China, Beijing.³

The animal represented in the Kresko vessel is now believed by scholars in China and the West to be a kind of tapir (*mo* 獬) or an ancient Chinese interpretation of the tapir. It is probably related to the Asian or Malayan tapir (*Tapirus indicus*), the largest of four extant species and a remnant of a far greater assemblage of tapirs that once inhabited large expanses of Europe and Asia.⁴ In Shang and pre-Shang antiquity, some variety of tapir could still be found in southern China, along with the elephant and the rhinoceros.⁵



The earliest known bronze vessels resembling a tapir are from the Western Zhou dynasty (c.1050–771 B.C.). An archaeologically recovered piece in Baoji dates to the period between 950 and 900 B.C. It has a large opening on the back with a lid surmounted by a small tigerlike animal; an eight-character inscription may be found on the underside of the lid. It should be pointed out that the prominent, elongated snout in this piece would become less pronounced in later examples.⁶ Another early and important example is in the collection of the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.⁷

Bronzes in the form of tapirs began to appear in greater numbers at the end of the Spring and Autumn period (771–c.475 B.C.) and the beginning of the Warring States period (c.475–221 B.C.). Many were made in sets of three or four and served as supports for lamps, containers, or items of furniture. Such animal-form objects may also have been made as part of larger ensembles. The next step in the evolution of tapir-form vessels was decoration with inlays of various precious metals and semiprecious minerals. Two fine examples are tapir-shaped wine containers (*zun* 尊) in the National Palace Museum, Taipei, one featuring intricate inlaid gold, silver, and turquoise decoration of geometric patterns all over the animal's body, and the other with inlaid decoration of gold, copper, turquoise, and malachite.⁸ An even more spectacular Warring States example, with exceptionally well preserved inlaid decoration, was once owned by the Swiss collector Gottlieb Friedrich Reber (1880–1959).⁹



View of the tapir vessel from above

During the Northern Song dynasty, as part of a general trend of antiquarianism (*fu gu* 復古), there was a revival of interest in tapir-form vessels. They were apparently made in considerable quantity and continued to be popular throughout the Southern Song, Yuan, and Ming dynasties. The Burrell Collection, Glasgow, has a *zun* in the form of a tapir that is believed to be of Song date.¹⁰ A large concentration may be found in the National Palace Museum, Taipei, which has at least nine Song and Yuan tapir-form vessels, but only one of them has been securely dated to the Yuan and published as such.¹¹

Until recently, it was common to find such vessels described as “Song to Ming”; scholars, collectors, and dealers alike were unable to be more specific. However, two



Fig. 3: Vessel in the form of a tapir; Yuan dynasty (1279–1368), late thirteenth–mid-fourteenth century; bronze inlaid with gold and silver; height 16.5 cm, length 21 cm, width 8.3 cm; Saint Louis Art Museum, Museum Purchase 273.1919.

vessels published by Michael Goedhuis with Colnaghi Oriental in 1989 were assigned Yuan dates, based on conclusions drawn from thermoluminescence testing, which helped to put a more concrete marker between Song and Ming styles.¹² The first of the two Goedhuis pieces, with ribbonlike inlaid spirals on the body, has two very close parallel vessels, one in the Saint Louis Art Museum (Fig. 3) and another in the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.¹² The decoration on Song and Yuan animal-form bronzes tends to emphasize inlaid designs, much like those from the Warring States period, although the actual designs may or may not have been faithful to ancient models. In the Ming, however, the decorative impulse shifted toward a bolder sense of dimensionality, particularly in the use of low- or medium-relief patterns on the vessels. A tapir-shaped bronze vessel in the Idemitsu Museum of Arts, Tokyo, retains the distinctive Yuan inlaid spirals on the animal's haunches, but various parts of the head and the collar are now articulated by raised elements.¹⁴ The spread of relief decoration over increasing areas of the body may be clearly seen in a late Ming *zun* in the form of a tapir, exhibited by the Oriental Ceramic Society of Hong Kong in 1986, where the animal's harness and the bold, raised spirals on the haunches visually compete on an equal level with the linear, geometric, and stylized inlaid decoration.¹⁵

The design and decoration of the Kresko vessel appears later than the Idemitsu piece but earlier than the one exhibited in Hong Kong. It is most comparable to the Ming wine container exhibited at Sydney L. Moss Ltd. in 1999 and to another that was sold at Christie's New York the same year.¹⁶ It is possible that the Moss, Christie's, and Kresko vessels were produced in the same region or even in the same workshop, and that all three were made sometime during the sixteenth or early seventeenth century.

Technical Notes

The body of the tapir was integrally cast, but the ears were cast and attached separately. The lid is solid cast and hinged with a pin. Other examples of tapir vessels have a hole in the animal's mouth, but this figure does not. Whether the silver and gilt copper were inlaid or overlaid cannot be determined with visual examination. Red and green pigmented waxes have been used to simulate corrosion.

Provenance

Sotheby's New York, 1995; Sydney L. Moss Ltd., London, 1995–1996; Collection of Robert E. Kresko, St. Louis, 1996–2005.

Published

Sotheby's New York, *Fine Chinese Ceramics, Furniture and Works of Art*, Sale 6678, March 22, 1995, lot no. 164; Ma Jinhong, *Ming Qing tongqi* (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2004), p. 101, no. 68.

Exhibited

"In the Shadow of Dragons: The Robert Kresko Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes," The Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas, Texas, March 7–September 9, 2001.

¹ There is a bronze tapir-shaped water dropper in the Shanghai Museum from the Ming dynasty, sixteenth to early seventeenth century, in Chu-tsing Li and James C. Y. Watt, eds., *The Chinese Scholar's Studio: Artistic Life in the Late Ming Period: An Exhibition from the Shanghai Museum* (New York: Thames and Hudson Inc., in association with New York: The Asia Society Galleries, 1987), p. 119, cat. no. 64 and p. 178, cat. no. 64.

² From Shouchang, Shandong province, Shang dynasty (c.1766–c.1050 B.C.), probably late twelfth or early eleventh century B.C., bronze, The Avery Brundage Collection (B60 B1+), in William Watson, *Ancient Chinese Bronzes* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1962), pl. 25a; René-Yvon Lefebvre d'Argencé, *Bronze Vessels of Ancient China in The Avery Brundage Collection* (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, 1977), pp. 42–43, cat. no. 13; Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, *The Asian Art Museum of San Francisco: Selected Works* (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, in association with Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1994), pp. 79 and 84; Christian Deydier, *Les bronzes archaïques chinois (Archaic Chinese Bronzes)*, vol. 1, *Xia & Shang* (Paris: Les Éditions d'Art et d'Histoire, ARHIS, 1995), p. 280.

³ Excavated in 1963 in Xingping 興平 county, Shaanxi province, Western Han, bronze inlaid with gold and silver cloud designs, in National Museum of Chinese History, comp., *A Journey into China's Antiquity*, Yu Weichao, ed., vol. 2 (Beijing: Morning Glory Publishers, 1997), pp. 128–130, no. 128; and NHK, *Sekai yondai bunmei Chūgoku bunmei ten (Chinese Civilization)* (Tokyo: NHK [Nihon hōsōkyōkai]; Tokyo: NHK Puromōshon [NHK Promotions], 2000), p. 113, cat. no. 61.

⁴ Fossils of an ancient relative, the much larger Pleistocene-era tapir (*Tapirus augustus*), have been found in Sichuan and Guizhou in southwestern China. This ancient tapir grew to a length of eleven feet and a height of five feet at the shoulder, the size of a small or medium rhinoceros; it became extinct some 10,000 years ago.

⁵ See Alfred Russel Wallace, *The Geographical Distribution of Animals: With a Study of the Relations of Living and Extinct Faunas as Elucidating the Past Changes of the Earth's Surface* (London: Macmillan, 1876), vol. 1, p. 220 sq., and map at beginning of volume; Carl W. Bishop, "The Elephant and Its Ivory in Ancient China," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 41, no. 4 (1921), p. 295; and E. T. C. Werner, *Myths and Legends of China* (New York: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1922), pp. 19–20, under the heading "Organic Environment."

⁶ Known as the Jing Ji tapir-form *zun*-type vessel (*Jing Ji mo xing zun* 井姬貌形尊), after the tomb occupant, Jing Ji, wife of the Count of Yu, mentioned in the inscription, it was one of ten bronzes excavated in 1976 from Tomb No. 2 at Rujiazhuang 茹家莊, Baoji 寶雞 county, Shaanxi province, Baoji Municipal Museum. It is worth noting that the term *mo zun* 貌尊 ("zun-type vessel in the form of a tapir") was coined in the spring of 1993 by the late Ma Chengyuan 馬承源 (1927–2004), an esteemed scholar of ancient Chinese bronzes who was also then the director of the Shanghai Museum, when he visited Baoji and studied this bronze vessel.

⁷ Ritual wine vessel (*zun*) in the form of a tapir, Western Zhou, bronze, in Yamanaka & Co., *Illustrated Catalogue of the Remarkable Collection of Ancient Chinese Bronzes, Beautiful Old Porcelains, Amber and Stone Carvings, Sumptuous Eighteenth Century Brocades, Interesting Old Paintings on Glass and Fine Old Carpets, Rugs and Furniture*, American Art Association, New York, January 29–31, 1914 (New York: American Art Association, 1914), frontispiece; Parke-Bernet Galleries, Inc., *Important Oriental Art, Including Early Dynastic Bronzes and Pottery, Stone Sculptures, Jades, Porcelains*, Sale 1737, March 1, 1957 (New York: Parke-Bernet Galleries, Inc., 1957), pp. 34–35, lot no. 156; and Thomas Lawton, "Yamanaka Sadajirō: Advocate for Asian Art," *Orientations*, vol. 26, no. 1 (January 1995): p. 86, fig. 13.

⁸ Published in Liu Wanhong, "Jiu yu qingtong jiu qi," *Gugong wenwu yuekan (The National Palace Museum Monthly of Chinese Art)*, vol. 2, no. 10 (January 1985) (cumulative no. 22), p. 10; and Wen C. Fong and James C. Y. Watt, *Possessing the Past: Treasures from the National Palace Museum, Taipei* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1996), p. 82, pl. 46; and fourth century B.C., in the National Palace Museum, Taipei (*Zhong tong* 中銅 00124), published in Yang Meili, "Tan zhizuo zhi yuanshi bu jingchuan zhi quewang: Tong qi yi qian nian lai yanjiu gaiguan," *Gugong wenwu yuekan (The National Palace Museum Monthly of Chinese Art)*, vol. 6, no. 7 (October 1988) (cumulative no. 67), p. 114; Xu Yahui (Hsü Ya-hui), "Zhan'guo zhongqi kan songlu shi

kongque shi jinshu si xi zun” (part of the article “Gugong wenwu du De zhan: Zhanpin xilie xuanjie (2): Tong qi”), *Gugong wenwu yuekan (The National Palace Museum Monthly of Chinese Art)*, vol. 21, no. 5 (August 2003) (cumulative no. 245): p. 27 (see also illustrations on front cover and inside front cover); and Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, *Schätze der Himmelssöhne: Die kaiserliche Sammlung aus dem Nationalen Palastmuseum, Taipeh: Die Grossen Sammlungen* (Bonn: Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland GmbH; Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2003), p. 159, cat. no. 46.

⁹ Vessel in the form of a tapir, Eastern Zhou dynasty, Warring States period, fourth century B.C., bronze inlaid with gold and turquoise, formerly in the collection of Gottlieb Friedrich Reber (1880–1959) and exhibited in Berlin, 1929; in *Ausstellung chinesischer Kunst: Veranstaltet von der Gesellschaft für Ostasiatische Kunst und der Preussischen Akademie der Kunst, Berlin, 12. Januar bis 2. April 1929*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Würfel Verlag, 1929), p. 198, cat. no. 496; and as a full-page advertisement by Littleton & Hennessy in *Orientalism*, vol. 38, no. 2 (March 2007), p. 37.

¹⁰ Bronze inlaid with gold and silver, The Burrell Collection, Glasgow, Scotland (8.136), in Shelagh McPherson, “Chinese Art in the Burrell Collection,” *Bulletin of the Oriental Ceramic Society of Hong Kong*, no. 7 (1984–1986), p. 58, fig. 27.

¹¹ Animal-shaped *zun* vessel, Yuan dynasty, bronze inlaid with gold and silver (*Zhong tong* 中銅 00730), published in Guoli gugong bowu yuan (National Palace Museum), *Gu se: Shiliu zhi shiba shiji yishu de fanggu feng (Through the Prism of the Past: Antiquarian Trends in Chinese Art of the 16th to 18th Century)* (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowu yuan [National Palace Museum], 2003), p. 186, cat. no. III-55 (illustrations and captions), and pp. 254–255, cat. no. III-55 (catalogue entry). Among the other eight tapir-shaped *zun*, four are classified as “post-Han” (*Zhong tong* 中銅 00729; *Zhong tong* 中銅 01520; *Gu tong* 故銅 01834; and *Gu tong* 故銅 01835), and another four as “post-Song” (*Zhong tong* 中銅 01677; *Zhong tong* 中銅 01680; *Zhong tong* 中銅 01781; and *Zhong tong* 中銅 01767). All of these are catalogued as part of the Digital Archives Project of Chinese Antiquities at the National Palace Museum (*Gugong qiwu diancang ziliao jiansuo xitong* 故宮器物典藏資料檢索系統) and also in the Union Catalog of National Digital Archives Program, Taiwan (*Shuwei diancang guojia xing keji jihua lianhe mulu xitong* 數位典藏國家型科技計劃聯合目錄系統).

¹² Oxford Authentication Ltd., Oxfordshire, England; TL Sample no. 466j42. See Michael Goedhuis, *Chinese and Japanese Bronzes, A.D. 1100–1900* (London: Colnaghi Oriental, 1989), cat. no. 80 (bronze inlaid with silver and gold, previously published in Christie’s New York, *Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art*, Sale 5914, June 6, 1985, p. 202, lot no. 487, as “Song dynasty”); and cat. no. 81 (formerly collection of Edmund W. Mudge Jr., bronze inlaid with silver and gold, *ibid.*, p. 202, lot no. 488, published as “Ming dynasty”).

¹³ St. Louis: Vessel in the Form of a Tapir, Yuan dynasty, late thirteenth to mid-fourteenth century, bronze inlaid with gold and silver, Museum Purchase (273:1919); Toronto: Vessel in the Form of a Mythical Beast, Yuan dynasty or Ming dynasty, thirteenth to fourteenth century, bronze inlaid with silver and gilt copper, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Gift of Mrs. H.D. Warren (916.10.8), in Royal Ontario Museum, *Homage to Heaven, Homage to Earth: Chinese Treasures of the Royal Ontario Museum* (Toronto and Buffalo, N.Y.: University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1992), p. 102, no. 53.

¹⁴ “Incense burner in the shape of an animal,” Ming dynasty, bronze inlaid with gold, published in Idemitsu bijutsukan, comp. and ed., *Chūgoku no kōgei: Idemitsu bijutsukan zōhin zuroku (Ancient Chinese Arts in the Idemitsu Collection)* (Tokyo: Idemitsu bijutsukan, 1992), cat. no. 463.

¹⁵ Bronze inlaid with gold and silver, published as “Song to late Ming dynasty” (but also acknowledged in the catalogue as more likely to be late Ming) in Gerard Tsang and Hugh Moss, *Arts from the Scholar’s Studio: Catalogue of an Exhibition Presented by the Oriental Ceramic Society of Hong Kong and the Fung Ping Shan Museum, University of Hong Kong, 24 October to 13 December 1986* (Hong Kong: The Oriental Ceramic Society of Hong Kong, 1986), pp. 154–55, no. 127.

¹⁶ See the wine-pouring vessel in the form of an imaginary tapirlike beast, with its head somewhat tilted backward; Ming dynasty, sixteenth to early seventeenth century, bronze inlaid with gold and silver foil and silver wire, in Sydney L. Moss Ltd., *Escape from the Dusty World: Chinese Paintings and Literati Works of Art* (London: Sydney L. Moss Ltd., 1999), pp. 366–71, cat. no. 113; and a bronze vessel inlaid with gold and silver, in Christie’s New York, *Fine Chinese Ceramics, Paintings and Works of Art*, Sale 9082, March 22, 1999, pp. 56–57, lot no. 75 (listed as “Song/Ming Dynasty”). The decoration on the Kresko piece is very similar to that on the Christie’s vessel, but the former falls a little short of the density and quality of the latter.

No. 7

銅三足萬年如意紋炭爐或爐盤

Brazier Pan or Censer Tray

Ming dynasty (1368–1644), 16th–early 17th century

Cast bronze with cast and cold-worked decoration and reign mark; height 7 cm, diameter 45.5 cm

Collection of Robert E. Kresko



This broad, shallow, circular pan or tray is raised on three squat cabriole legs, which are separately attached to the base of three segmented arcs that extend out from the low foot ring. On the underside is a six-character apocryphal reign mark reading *Da Ming Xuande nian zhi* 大明宣德年製 (“Made in the Xuande era of the Great Ming”).

The outward-facing sides of the added supports are the only decorated parts of the object. Rising from the center of each cabriole foot is the design of a sacred lily, an evergreen plant known in Chinese as *wannian qing* 萬年青 (“green for ten thousand years”), with a

cluster of berrylike fruit.¹ Behind and to either side of the plant are stylized clouds resembling the heads of a special mushroom known as *lingzhi* 靈芝 (“herb of spiritual potency”).² These cloud forms are called *ruyi* 如意 (“as you wish”), as they are shaped like the heads of *ruyi*-scepters, an object that functions much like a magic wand. The combination of the sacred lily and the *ruyi*-shaped clouds is therefore a rebus or visual pun for the auspicious expression *wannian ruyi* 萬年如意 (“may your wishes come true for ten thousand years”).³ This rebus often appears in the fine and decorative arts of Ming and Qing China.⁴ Here, the decorative rebus adds considerable interest and complexity to what would otherwise be an object of minimalist design.

The original function of this pan or tray is not known. Such bronzes have existed in one form or another since antiquity, but their functions as independent objects are not always clearly defined, nor are they necessarily limited to one specific use. As suggested by the title assigned to this work, it could have served as a brazier pan or a censer tray.

During the Shang and Western Zhou dynasties, related objects in the form of bronze basins (*pan* 盤) were often used with bronze pitchers (*yi* 匜) for performing ablutions before and after meals. However, these were considerably deeper than the Kresko piece, whose sides are too low to have contained much water. It was at the end of the Western Zhou and the early Eastern Zhou that the tray or platter evolved into a new form and function as a brazier (*lu* 爐) or brazier pan (*tan lu* 炭爐 or *lu pan* 爐盤), which takes a rectangular or circular shape.⁵ The most elaborate examples of this type date from the Warring States period (c.475–221 B.C.), usually with the added feature of chain handles to facilitate the lifting of the brazier when it was filled with hot charcoal.

During the Han dynasty cast bronze trays, in addition to those made of lacquer, were fairly abundant; typically they were used to hold vessels containing food or wine. One of the best-known examples of a circular bronze tray from this period is part of a two-piece set in the Palace Museum, Beijing, comprising a gilt bronze cylindrical wine container (variously termed *hu* 壺 or *zun* 尊) set on a large and very shallow bronze platter. The wine container and the platter are each supported on three legs in the form of squatting bears whose bodies were originally inlaid with turquoise.⁶ The platter is completely unadorned, apart from its three animal-form supports and a sixty-two-character inscription on its flat rim giving the date, place of production (Sichuan), and names of its makers. The lack of decoration on the platter is understandable since its ostensible purpose was to hold red-hot charcoal that kept warm the wine in the container above. A similar object from the non-Han Chinese, nomadic Xianbei 鮮卑 culture was discovered more recently in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region of China. Only a little taller and larger than the Kresko piece, the large bronze tray has three legs in the form of bears, is inlaid with gold wire, and has traces of gilding.⁷

In the period of political disunion following the demise of the Eastern Han dynasty (A.D. 25–220), bronze production declined while ceramics came of age. Like many other kinds of vessels previously made of bronze, trays or platters began to appear in pottery. Because of the limited weight that could be supported on such a tray made of earthenware, it would have held only small vessels for food or wine. Bronze trays and platters seemed to regain popularity during the early Ming period, when they became one of the bronze types commissioned by the Xuande emperor (1398–1435; r. 1426–1435) during his short reign.

What remains to be considered is the Kresko tray's probable date. As the tray itself is so plain and minimally articulated, the only clue lies in the decoration of the three attached leg pieces that provide support. As in several other bronzes in the Kresko collection, the design of the clouds is taken into account. Here, the form, density, and patterning conform to cloud scrolls found on numerous examples of sixteenth-century Ming lacquerware, especially those dated to the Jiajing period (1522–1566) or slightly later.⁸ On this basis, the object has been conservatively assigned to the sixteenth or early seventeenth century, with the assumption that the decorated feet are original to the piece, or at the very least made around the same time.



Detail of leg



Apocryphal reign mark on base

Technical Notes

The heavy tray is solid cast, with three scallops equidistant along the bottom edge to which are riveted the separately cast feet. There are cold-worked details on the feet, and the reign mark also was finished with cold-working.

¹ *Rohdea japonica* is an herbaceous perennial that is native to East Asia and may be found from southwestern China to Japan. It has broad, deep green leaves, develops yellowish flowers that are borne on a short, stout spike, and produces bright red fruit in a tight cluster. The small but showy fruit appear in late fall and last through winter, providing a highly attractive contrast to the straplike leaves.

² *Ganoderma lucidum* is a fungal species found worldwide but especially prized in China and elsewhere in East Asia for its medicinal properties and its cultural associations with longevity and immortality.

³ See Terese Tse Bartholomew, *Hidden Meanings in Chinese Art (Zhongguo jixiang tu'an)* (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum-Chong-Moon Lee Center for Asian Art and Culture, 2006), p. 260, no. 9.6.5, and p. 263, no. 9.9.2.

⁴ See, for instance, a small jade basin design of the *Rohdea japonica* and the *lingzhi* fungus, Qing dynasty, 1800–1900, nephrite, Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, The Avery Brundage Collection (B60 J430); see *ibid.*, p. 263, no. 9.9.2.

⁵ For the important role of braziers throughout much of Chinese civilization, see chapter 19 of Sarah Handler, *Austere Luminosity of Chinese Classical Furniture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 319–31. Ming-period circular bronze braziers, raised on low feet as in the Kresko piece, may be seen in p. 323, fig. 19.7 (in a detail from a painting by the late fifteenth-century Ming court artist Liu Jun 劉俊, *Song Emperor Taizu Visiting His Prime Minister*

Zhao Pu on a Snowy Night [Xue ye fang Pu tu zhou 雪夜訪普圖軸], hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, Palace Museum, Beijing); and in p. 324, fig. 19.8 (in a detail of a woodblock illustration to the *Tang shi hua pu* 《唐詩畫譜》 or *Illustrations to Tang Poems*, compiled by Huang Fengchi 黃鳳池 in the early seventeenth century during the late Ming dynasty).

⁶ Reportedly excavated around 1950 or 1951 in Shaanxi province, Eastern Han dynasty (A.D. 9–220), dated A.D. 45, in Wan-go H.C. Weng and Yang Boda, *The Palace Museum, Peking: Treasures of the Forbidden City* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1982), p. 143, no. 76; and Gugong bowu yuan, *Gugong bowu yuan cang bao lu* (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian Xianggang fendian [Joint Publishing (H.K.) Co., Ltd.]; Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985), p. 20 (bottom) and pp. 99–100 (descriptive text by Fang Guojin).

⁷ Excavated in 1983 at Shangdu 商都 county (in the former Ulanqab League, now Ulanqab Municipality), Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region; A.D. third century, Ulanqab Municipal Museum (Wulanchabu shi bowu guan 烏蘭察布市博物館), Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. Published in Adam T. Kessler, *Empires Beyond the Great Wall: The Heritage of Genghis Khan* (Los Angeles: Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, 1993), p. 66 (detail of fig. 43) and p. 72, fig. 43.

⁸ See, for example, those on a square cross-sectioned rice measure, Jiajing mark and period, carved red, green, and yellow-brown lacquer, height 16.3 cm, width and depth 31.9 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, John Stuart Kennedy Fund, 1913 (13.100.140), published in Fritz Löw-Beer, “Chinese Lacquer of the Middle and Late Ming Period,” *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities*, no. 24 (1952), pl. 8, figs. 3–64; and Denise P. Leidy, Wai-fong Anita Siu, and James C.Y. Watt, “Chinese Decorative Arts,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, vol. 55, no. 1 (Summer 1997), p. 69.



No. 8

鑲金銅佛立像

Standing Buddha

Ming dynasty (1368–1644), Wanli period (1573–1619), dated 1612

Cast bronze with cold working, with traces of gilding;

height 57.8 cm, width 16.8 cm

Saint Louis Art Museum, Partial and promised gift of Robert E. Kresko

4:2005

This sculpture of a Buddha is dated by a dedicatory inscription to 1612. The figure stands tall and erect on a high, waisted double-lotus base that is in turn supported by a low hexagonal plinth open on five sides. The lotus base and the plinth are fused into one on the back, forming a relatively large area for the five-column, 29-character cold-worked inscription (善信賀應科，同緣張氏，尤男賀大年、有年，姪盛年供奉。萬曆壬子季春吉旦。), which may be rendered as follows: “Respectfully offered by the virtuous believer He Yingke and his wife Madam Zhang, as well as their sons He Danian and Younian, and their nephew Shengnian on an auspicious morning in the spring of the *renzi* year during the Wanli era.” The various people mentioned in the inscription are not otherwise identified in the literature of the time. Nothing is known of the geographical location where the bronze may have been made and offered by the couple and the three younger men, except that it would have been placed either at a Buddhist temple or in a family shrine. From a calligraphic standpoint, the incised inscription is typical of the dedicatory writings found on such pieces of figural sculpture in the late Ming period. As a dated work of Buddhist sculpture, this piece joins an ever-increasing group of similarly documented pieces that will aid in the more accurate art-historical placement of undated Ming and Qing examples.

The Buddha has a very serene expression, with downcast almond-shaped eyes, long pendulous earlobes, and tightly curled hair. There is an *urna* below the hairline, and the domed *usnisa* is surmounted by a wish-fulfilling jewel (*cintamani*) finial in the form of a lotus bud. The figure is shown dressed in long flowing robes falling from his shoulders and arms down to the top of the upper lotus pedestal with overlapping petals, as the long sleeves descend to midcalf. The central portion of the chest is exposed, while the feet are symmetrically placed with weight equally balanced between them. The punched-ground floral borders of the drapery are stiff, flatter, and more linear, and not as naturalistic compared to earlier Song and Yuan sculptures. The entire sculpture was once gilded, but only traces are now left. The figure's left arm is raised to waist level with the hand in *vitarkamudrā*, its fingers curled and touching, while the right hangs down with the open palm facing out in *varadamudrā*, a gesture of charity and compassion. The left hand here may once have held an attribute of some kind. As it is, however, this particular combination of hand gestures is rarely seen in Buddhist iconography and thus the figure defies easy identification.



View of back of head



Detail of back, showing inscription

According to one interpretation, the two *mudrās* are associated with Amitābha, Buddha of the Western Paradise, as he receives believers into his realm. This is the case with two well-known dated sculptures with the same hand gestures in the British Museum.¹ It is possible that the present figure may be a representation of the Ratnasambhāva, one of the Five Dhyani Buddhas whose name means “the source of precious things” or “he who is born of the jewel.” He represents the southern direction and the element fire. However, Ratnasambhāva is almost never worshiped independently, and solitary images of him, especially in sculptural form, are rare. When this Buddha is depicted, it is most often in two-dimensional form on mandalas, with the other four Dhyani Buddhas, in a seated position, and with the soles of the feet exposed.²

Among the very rare statues of the standing Ratnasambhāva Buddha is a Yuan-dynasty example now in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei.³ One of its features—a high-waisted Chinese-style skirt fastened with a sash just below Ratnasambhāva’s chest—may also be found on the Kresko Buddha. However, the auspicious swastika that is present on the chest of the Taipei piece is not found in the Kresko example. George Kuwayama’s keen observations on this Yuan sculpture are worth noting:

The hand positions observed in this image are typical of Ratnasambhāva.

The right hand displays the gesture of charity, and the left hand placed across the chest may have held the wish-fulfilling jewel. . . . This gesture of the hand, with the thumb and index finger forming a circle, signifies esoteric power. . . .

The mound of light positioned in front of the cranial bump is an iconographic feature that first appeared in the Song dynasty (960–1279), but the portly body, the wide bared chest, and the free-flowing robe that hangs loosely over the shoulders have not yet been codified in the rigid stylization of the Ming period (1368–1644).⁴

If this sculpture is indeed the Ratnasambhāva Buddha (in Chinese, Baosheng fo 寶生佛, “Buddha Who Is the Producer of Treasures”), then it may have been commissioned and made in conjunction with four other images of similar size and scale to represent the other four transcendental Buddhas of Vajrayāna Buddhism, with Vairocana at the center and the others arranged directionally around him.

Technical Notes

The surface is not highly finished. This may be because at one time the sculpture was entirely covered with a heavy layer of gilding. The gold lies on top of a shiny, thick, dark red (possibly cuprite) layer. There is a shiny pigmented varnish (soluble in acetone) on the surface overall. This may have been applied to tone the bright bronze surface that was exposed when the gilding was lost. The sculpture is hollow cast; the core has been removed, although there are remnants of core material in crevices. The figure is attached to the lotus base by means of an interior flange and spot welds. Under magnification, it appears the inscription, decoration, and features of the sculpture were cold-worked. However, the curls of the hair were cast.

Provenance

Sotheby's London, 1993; The Oriental Art Gallery Limited, London, 1993–1994; Collection of Robert E. Kresko, St. Louis, 1994–2005.

Published

Sotheby's London, *Fine Chinese Bronzes, Ceramics and Works of Art*, June 8, 1993 (London: Sotheby's, 1993), p. 74, lot no. 136; The Oriental Art Gallery Limited, *Oriental Works of Art: Opening Tuesday, 7th June 1994* (London: The Oriental Art Gallery Limited, 1994), cat. no. 19.

Exhibited

“In the Shadow of Dragons: The Robert Kresko Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes,” The Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas, Texas, March 7–September 9, 2001.

¹ See the standing figure of Amitābha Buddha on a lotus pedestal; Ming dynasty, Hongwu period (1368–1398), dated 1396, gilt bronze, The British Museum, London, Seligman Bequest (OA 1973.7–26.81), in W. Zwalf, ed., *Buddhism: Art and Faith* (London: British Museum Publications Limited, 1985), p. 208, cat. no. 300 (cat. entry by Derek Gillman). According to the inscription on this piece, it was one of forty-eight bronzes commissioned to repay the so-called four kindnesses (of one's mother and father, the Buddha, and the teaching of the doctrine). See also the standing figure of Amitābha; Ming dynasty, Chenghua period (1465–1487), dated 1467, gilt bronze, The British Museum, London (OA 1942.4–17.1); *ibid.*, p. 209, cat. no. 302 (cat. entry by Derek Gillman).

² See Meher McArthur, *Reading Buddhist Art: An Illustrated Guide to Buddhist Signs and Symbols* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 2002), p. 41.

³ Yuan dynasty (1279–1368), thirteenth century, gilt bronze, National Palace Museum, Taipei, in Pratapaditya Pal, *Light of Asia: Buddha Sakyamuni in Asian Art* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1984), p. 296, cat. no. 162 (cat. entry by George Kuwayama). The work was formerly in the important collection of Peng Kaidong 彭楷棟, a Tokyo-based Chinese émigré also known as Nitta Mune'ichi 新田棟一.

⁴ *Ibid.*



No. 9

胡文明款帶瑪瑙頂木蓋仿古饗饗紋鼎式銅嵌金銀香爐

Hu Wenming (active c.1572–1620)

Archaistic Tripod Censer with Cover

Ming dynasty (1368–1644), Wanli period (1573–1619), early 17th century

Cast bronze with inlaid and overlaid gold and silver, with a coating over induced surface color; wood cover with agate finial; height with cover and finial 21 cm, height without cover and finial 18.8 cm; width across handles 12.7 cm, diameter of mouth 12.7 cm

Saint Louis Art Museum, Partial and promised gift of Robert E. Kresko

7:2005a,b

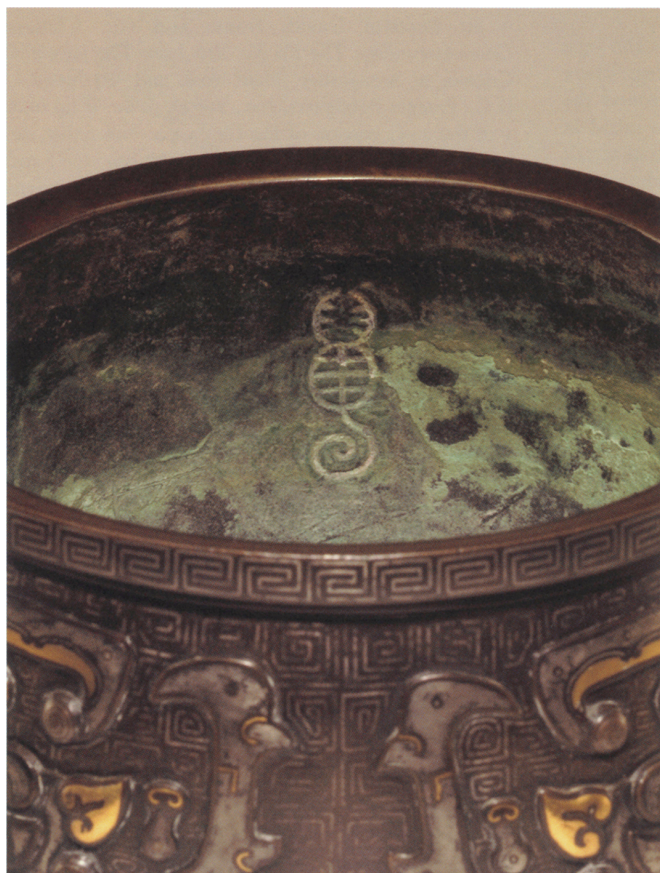
This small tripod censer imitates the form of late Shang and early Western Zhou ritual tripods with lobed bodies known as *li ding* 鬲鼎. Each of the body's three lobes is decorated with a *taotie* 饗饗, or monster mask motif, in low relief against a ground of squared *leiwen* 雷紋 (“thunder patterns”). A downward-pointing triangular lappet adorns the outside of each cylindrical leg. The vertical lip and the handles are decorated with single bands of the keyfret pattern. All the decorative designs are inlaid with overlaid gold or silver, a technique that recalls inlaid bronzes from the Eastern Zhou dynasty (771–221 B.C.). The large circular eyes of each mask motif are given special prominence with a thick layering of gold; this effect, in the terminology of Ming and Qing bronzes, is known as “yellow eyes” (*huang mu* 黃目). The vessel has an incised stylized character *wan* 萬 on the interior wall, an epigraphical feature that is often present in archaic bronzes of this type and form. On the underside of the body is a six-character mark reading *Yunjian Hu Wenming zao* 雲間胡文明作 (“Made by Hu Wenming of Yunjian”), relief-cast in two columns without a surrounding border.

The *li ding* tripod vessel is a classic bronze form that was common during the end of the Shang dynasty (c.1766–c.1050 B.C.) and the beginning of the Western Zhou dynasty (c.1050–771 B.C.). Examples of such archaic bronzes from the eleventh century B.C. may be found in many collections.¹ The compactness and portability of certain ancient bronze tripods of this type enabled them to be used as censers in later periods, particularly in domestic settings or scholars' studios. According to a seminal early Ming-dynasty manual on connoisseurship, the *Ge gu yao lun* 《格古要論》 (Essential Criteria of Antiquities), which was originally compiled by Cao Zhao 曹昭 in 1388 and subsequently revised and enlarged by Wang Zuo 王佐 in 1462, archaic bronze vessels were never used for such a purpose because the burning of incense was actually a much later practice: “Incense was unknown in earliest times. Instead, artemisia was burnt because of its notable smell. Hence there were no incense-burners in those days. Ancient vessels used as incense-burners today were sacrificial vessels, such as the *i* [yi 彝] and the *ting* [ding 鼎] and not (real) incense-burners.”²

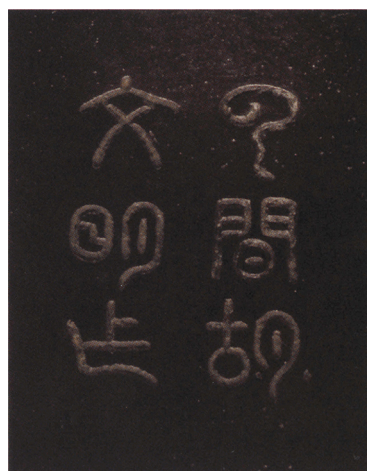
Numerous archaic bronzes were already in circulation during the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127), when antiquarian interest spurred the production of archaistic bronzes. Publications of illustrated catalogues of ancient bronzes did much to disseminate ancient designs to later periods.³ The impact of this kind of illustrated catalogue can be seen in many extant objects, such as a well-known Ming-dynasty bronze vessel in the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Known as the “Fei” tripod (*Fei ding* 非鼎) from a cast inscription on the interior of its body, it is clearly based on one of 839 bronze objects published in an early twelfth-century catalogue, the *Xuanhe bogu tu* 《宣和博古圖》, and it represents one of the most popular antiquarian styles of the late Ming and early Qing periods.⁴

Despite Hu Wenming’s fame as the finest metalworker of the late Ming period, little is known about him, except that he was a native of Huating 華亭 county, Songjiang 松江 prefecture, now part of Shanghai. He produced numerous kinds of practical and ornamental objects that appealed to scholars, such as flower vases, brush pots, *ruyi* 如意 scepters, and so forth, but he is best known for his censers, handwarmers, and other implements related to incense culture (e.g., vases for incense tools, boxes for incense powder, spoons, and tongs, all classified as *xiang ju* 香具). He worked with both bronze and copper and was especially adept at parcel-gilding as well as inlays of gold and silver, and often a combination of the above, as a means of decoration. The best examples of his work are characterized by superb design and craftsmanship of the highest quality, with a style that is readily recognizable. Like censers with genuine Xuande marks, later Chinese bronzes made by Hu Wenming have a certain cachet that is associated with fine design and exceptional quality.

Bronze vessels produced by Hu Wenming and his workshop are usually identified by marks in various formats and character styles. There are marks with square or rectangular cartouches (with single-line or double-line borders, or no borders) and various styles of seal-script characters. The marks appear most frequently as six-character inscriptions reading *Yunjian Hu Wenming zhi* 雲間胡文明製 (“Made by Hu Wenming of Yunjian”).⁵ Marks reading *Yunjian Hu Wenming zuo* 雲間胡文明作, such as the one on the Kresko censer, are less common; in such contexts, the final characters *zhi* 製 and *zuo* 作 are understood to be interchangeable.⁶ There are also numerous Hu Wenming vessels with four-character marks reading *Hu Wenming zhi* 胡文明製 (“Made by Hu Wenming”), where the geographical indicator *Yunjian* 雲間 is omitted.⁷ In addition, there are very rare Hu Wenming marks that contain many more characters, such as a twelve-character mark on the base of a two-handled censer exhibited in Hong Kong in 1986 reading *Wanli guiwei ju yue Yunjian Hu Wenming zhi* 萬曆癸未菊月雲間胡文明製 (“Made by Hu Wenming of Yunjian in the chrysanthemum month of the *guiwei* year of the Wanli reign”), which incorporates the reign period, the cyclical year, and an alternate system for indicating months of the year based on the names of seasonal plants and flowers, thereby dating the object precisely to the ninth lunar month of 1583.⁸ An even longer sixteen-character Hu Wenming mark is



View of stylized character *wan* incised on the vessel's interior wall



View of maker's mark on the bottom of the vessel's body

found on the base of an incense burner formerly in the collection of Prof. and Mrs. Peter H. Plesch of Staffordshire, England. Reading *Ming Wanli guichou qiu zhong Hu Wenming zhi wei Shiyu zhai yong* 明萬曆癸丑秋仲胡文明製為石語齋用 (“Made for use in the Studio of Discussing Stones by Hu Wenming in the mid-autumn of the *guichou* year of the Wanli era of the Ming”), it dates the vessel to the eighth lunar month of 1613 and identifies the studio of the recipient, the scholar-official Zou Diguang 鄒迪光 (active late sixteenth to early seventeenth century) from the city of Wuxi 無錫.⁹ Apart from character styles, the two unique marks mentioned here are also very important because the specific dates of 1583 and 1613 help to frame Hu Wenming's period of activity.¹⁰ The considerable difference in the styles of the seal-script characters from vessel to vessel may be a good indicator of late Ming workshop practice, where freedom may have been given to individual artisans employed by the establishment.¹¹ Hu Wenming's workshop, which included his son Hu Guangyu 胡光宇, is believed to have been active for much of the mid-seventeenth century, extending well into the early decades of the Qing regime.¹²

Technical Notes

The censer is integrally cast with the handles and legs; core material is visible at the bottoms of the legs. There appears to be evidence of cold-working around the raised *taotie* masks. Gold and silver wire is inlaid in inscribed patterns, but the larger pieces of precious metals were overlaid using a false damascening technique in which the underlying bronze is not carved away. The marks appear to have been cast; because of their location they would have been difficult to cold-work.

Provenance

Sotheby's London, 1997; Sydney L. Moss, Ltd., London, 1997; Collection of Robert E. Kresko, St. Louis, 1997–2005.

Published

Sotheby's London, *Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art*, Sale LN7350, June 10, 1997, p. 80, lot no. 128; Saint Louis Art Museum, *Biennial Report 2005–2006* (St. Louis, Mo.: Saint Louis Art Museum, 2007), p. 15.

Exhibited

"In the Shadow of Dragons: The Robert Kresko Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes," The Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas, Texas, March 7–September 9, 2001.

I would like to express my thanks to Professor Lothar von Falkenhausen of the University of California, Los Angeles, for helping to identify the inscribed stylized character on the inner wall of the vessel. [P. K. H.]

¹ One of the best-known examples with a very similar decorative scheme is in the collection of the Musée Cernuschi, Paris (M.C. 8419). It is slightly larger, but comparable in proportions to the Kresko censer; see Gilles Béguin, ed., *Arts de l'Asie au musée Cernuschi* (Paris: Éditions des musées de la Ville de Paris; Paris: Éditions Findakly, 2000), pp. 42–43 (illustration and descriptive text) and p. 202 (checklist entry); and Olivier Venture, "Emblems on Shang and Western Zhou Bronzes in the Musée Cernuschi," *Orientations*, vol. 36, no. 5 (June 2005), p. 31, fig. 3c, and p. 32, fig. 4. Other examples include the following: an archaic and inscribed *li ding*, from the same period and of similar shape and size, in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia, Felton Bequest 1969 (AS4.1969), in Mae Anna Pang, in association with Judith Ryan, *An Album of Chinese Art from the National Gallery of Victoria* (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 1983), pp. 30–31; and a tripod ritual food vessel (*li ding*), Shang or Western Zhou, eleventh century B.C., bronze, Victoria and Albert Museum, London (M.2696-1931), in Rose Kerr, ed., *Chinese Art and Design: The T. T. Tsui Gallery of Chinese Art* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1991), p. 204, no. 95 (object on far left of table).

² Sir Percival David, trans. and ed., *Chinese Connoisseurship: The Ko Ku Yao Lun: The Essential Criteria of Antiquities* (New York and Washington, D.C.: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1971), p. 12; from *juan 1* of the 1462 edition of the *Ge gu yao lun*, under the heading of *Gu tongqi* 古銅器 ("Ancient Bronzes") and the subheading of *Gu xianglu* 古香爐 ("Ancient Incense Burners").

³ For instance, the *Kaogu tu* 《考古圖》 (Illustrations of Investigations in Antiquities) in *10 juan* compiled by Lü Dalin 呂大臨 (1042–1090) with a preface dated 1092, and the *Xuanhe bogu tu* 《宣和博古圖》 (Illustrations of Antiquities in the Xuanhe Hall) in *30 juan* commissioned by Emperor Huizong 徽宗 (1082–1135; r. 1101–1125) and compiled by Wang Fu 王黼 (1079–1126) between 1107 and 1123.

⁴ Formerly displayed in the detached palace of the Qing at Chengde, Hebei province; bronze (*Zhong tong* 中銅 01826), published in Guoli gugong bowu yuan (National Palace Museum), *Gu se: Shiliu zhi shiba shiji yishu de fanggu feng* (*Through the Prism of the Past: Antiquarian Trends in Chinese Art of the 16th to 18th Century*) [Taipei: Guoli gugong bowu yuan (National Palace Museum), 2003], p. 96, cat. no. II-09, and p. 234, cat. no. II-09.

⁵ See, for instance, a covered handwarmer with swing handle, parcel-gilt copper, a censer in the form of an archaic *gui* 簋 vessel, parcel-gilt copper, and a *ruyi*-scepter, parcel-gilt bronze, in Sydney L. Moss Ltd., *The Second Bronze Age: Later Chinese Metalwork* (London: Sydney L. Moss Ltd., 1991), cat. nos. 84, 87, and 100, respectively; two objects in the Phoenix Art Museum: a covered round incense box, bronze with gilding and inlaid with silver wire, and a two-handled censer in the form of an archaic *gui* vessel, copper with traces of gilding, in Robert D. Mowry, *China's Renaissance in Bronze: The Robert H. Clague Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes, 1100–1900* (Phoenix, Ariz.: Phoenix Art Museum, 1993), pp. 61–66, cat. no. 11, and pp. 67–73, cat. no. 12, respectively; and the mark on the base of a two-handled censer in the form of an archaic *gui* vessel, parcel-gilt bronze, from the collection of Florence and Herbert Irving, New York, on loan to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, in Denise P. Leidy, Wai-fong Anita Siu, and James C.Y. Watt, "Chinese Decorative Arts," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, vol. 55, no. 1 (Summer 1997), pp. 11–12.

⁶ For an example of a four-character mark reading *Hu Wenming zuo* 胡文明作, on the base of a vase for incense tools, formerly belonging to the Hong Kong collector Dr. Ip Yee (Ye Yi 葉義; d. 1984), parcel-gilt bronze inlaid with silver, in Gerard Tsang and Hugh Moss, "Chinese Metalwork of the Hu Wenming Group," in *International Asian Antiques Fair, Hong*

Kong, May 16th–19th, 1984, *Hotel Furama Inter-Continental* (Hong Kong: Andamans East International Ltd., 1984), p. 52, no. 24; and Gerard Tsang and Hugh Moss, *Arts from the Scholar's Studio: Catalogue of an Exhibition Presented by the Oriental Ceramic Society of Hong Kong and the Fung Ping Shan Museum, University of Hong Kong, 24 October to 13 December 1986* (Hong Kong: The Oriental Ceramic Society of Hong Kong, 1986), pp. 240–41, no. 230. Of the four characters in this mark, the first three (*hu* 胡, *wen* 文, and *ming* 明) are in a different style from those on the Kresko censer; only the final character *zuo* 作 is similar in both objects.

⁷ See, for instance, a covered round box for incense powder with design of a blossoming crab-apple tree and other plants and flowers, parcel-gilt bronze, in Tsang and Moss, “Chinese Metalwork of the Hu Wenming Group,” p. 50, no. 19; and Tsang and Moss, *Arts from the Scholar's Studio*, pp. 240–41, no. 231; a vase in the form of an archaic *gu* 觚 vessel, parcel-gilt bronze, in Tsang and Moss, “Chinese Metalwork of the Hu Wenming Group,” p. 54, no. 29; and Tsang and Moss, *Arts from the Scholar's Studio*, pp. 246–47, no. 237; a covered hand warmer with wing handle, bronze, in Tsang and Moss, “Chinese Metalwork of the Hu Wenming Group,” p. 57, no. 32; and Tsang and Moss, *Arts from the Scholar's Studio*, pp. 252–53, no. 246. See also a covered hand warmer with split swing handle, parcel-gilt copper, and a censer in the form of an archaic *gui* vessel, parcel-gilt copper, in Sydney L. Moss Ltd., *The Second Bronze Age*, cat. nos. 85 and 86, respectively; and the marks on the bases of a vase for storing incense utensils (parcel-gilt bronze), and a covered round box for incense powder (parcel-gilt copper), from the collection of Florence and Herbert Irving, New York, on loan to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, in Leidy, Siu, and Watt, “Chinese Decorative Arts,” pp. 11–12.

⁸ Censer in the form of an archaic *gui* vessel, interior inscribed *Zizi sunsun yongbao* 子子孫孫永寶 (“To be treasured eternally by innumerable descendents”), Ming dynasty, Wanli period, dated 1583, bronze inlaid with gold and silver; formerly in the collections of Mrs. Betty James, Westbrook, Connecticut and Hugh M. Moss (Shuisongshi Shanfang Collection), Hong Kong. Published in Aschwin Lippe, “Two Archaistic Bronzes of the Ming Dynasty,” *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America*, vol. 11 (1957), p. 78, figs. 1–2; Sheila Riddell, *Dated Chinese Antiquities, 600–1650* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber Limited, 1979), p. 140; Sotheby Parke Bernet, *Fine Chinese Jades, Works of Art and Snuff Bottles*, Sale 4810Y, February 25–26, 1982 (New York: Sotheby Parke Bernet Inc., 1982), lot no. 295a; Tsang and Moss, “Chinese Metalwork of the Hu Wenming Group,” p. 34, no. 1; and Tsang and Moss, *Arts from the Scholar's Studio*, pp. 110–11, no. 73.

⁹ Incense burner in the form of an archaic *pou* 甬 vessel, parcel-gilt bronze inlaid with silver, in Tsang and Moss, “Chinese Metalwork of the Hu Wenming Group,” p. 49, no. 16; and Tsang and Moss, *Arts from the Scholar's Studio*, pp. 134–35, no. 103.

¹⁰ In addition to the pieces dated 1583 and 1613, another Hu Wenming object is dated to the eighth lunar month of 1599, formerly in the collection of the late King Gustav VI Adolf (1882–1973) of Sweden, with a thirteen-character inscription incised on the inner lip of the vase in the form of an archaic *zun* 尊 vessel, gilt bronze, in Sydney L. Moss Ltd., *The Second Bronze Age*, cat. no. 90.

¹¹ For a selection of marks on objects by or attributed to Hu Wenming and his workshop, see Michael L. Eveleigh, *Later Chinese Bronzes: A Special Exhibition of 14th to 18th Century Examples, May 16th–19th, 1984, at the International Asian Antiques Fair, Furama Hotel, Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Andamans East International Ltd., 1984), cat. nos. 47, 48, 49, and 50; and Tsang and Moss, *Arts from the Scholar's Studio*, pp. 110–111, no. 73, and pp. 134–35, no. 103.

¹² An example of Hu Guangyu's work may be seen in a cylindrical tripod censer decorated with sprays of lotus, narcissus, and peony, Ming dynasty, early seventeenth century, parcel-gilt bronze, height 9.2 cm, diameter 10.5 cm, Shanghai Museum, in Chu-tsing Li and James C. Y. Watt, eds., *The Chinese Scholar's Studio: Artistic Life in the Late Ming Period: An Exhibition from the Shanghai Museum* (New York: Thames and Hudson Inc., in association with New York: The Asia Society Galleries, 1987), p. 118, cat. no. 62 (color illustration), and p. 177, cat. no. 62; and Helen Loveday, ed., *A l'ombre des pins: Chefs-d'œuvre d'art chinois du Musée de Shanghai* (Geneva: Musées d'art et d'histoire; Paris: Somogy Éditions d'Art, 2004), cat. no. 87.

No. 10

盧惟良款製吉祥瑞獸紋鑲金銅長方盒

Lu Weiliang (17th century)

Covered Box with Design of Auspicious and Mythical Animals

Ming dynasty (1368–1644), early 17th century

Copper or copper alloy cold-worked, with gilding and tinted surface coatings;

height 7.3 cm, width 13.8 cm, depth 11.5 cm

Collection of Robert E. Kresko

This covered rectangular box is simple in overall form but complex in decoration. The walls of the box rise vertically from the base, joining the heavy cover in a flushed manner. All five visible aspects of the box—the cover and four sides—are embellished with partially gilded relief decoration. The cover may be fitted onto the box in two ways and the cresting waves on the vertical sides of the cover will align correctly whichever direction the top is placed. The bottom of the box has a slightly countersunk rectangular panel, the center of which is an incised, cold-worked, three-character maker's mark reading Lu Weiliang 盧惟良. The interior surfaces of the box are undecorated.

The top panel of the cover is decorated in a style that is distinct from those of the sides. The bucolic scene depicts an elephant, a horse, and a dog in the swirling waters of a stream. Summer appears to be the season, as suggested by the lush reeds at the top right of the composition. The highly pictorial representation may have been borrowed in part or in whole from two-dimensional works such as paintings or woodblock-printed illustrated books. The choice of the animals may or may not have any particular meaning, but it should be noted that all of them are linked in some way to the economic, cultural, or social life of the Chinese.

Elephants have a long history in Chinese civilization, but by the Ming and Qing dynasties, they could be found only in the far south in Guangdong province and in the southwest (Guangxi, Guizhou, and Yunnan provinces) of China. Even then they were becoming increasingly scarce because of the widespread poaching for ivory tusks, which reached its height in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹ In secular contexts, elephants came to be connected with numerous positive qualities, such as strength, steadfastness, wisdom, responsibility, longevity, and earthiness, but they remained most prominent in the life of the Chinese through Buddhism. A novice in the faith is typically symbolized by a gray elephant that may run rampant and destroy everything along its path. However, after his mind has been trained through the practice of the Dharma, his status is symbolized by a white elephant that can be properly directed and has the power to remove any obstacle in its way.²



The horse also has a long history in China, especially since the importation of Central Asian breeds in the Western Han dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 9). They were used as a reliable means of transport but are also revered in Buddhism. It is said that Siddhārtha Gautama had a white horse named Kantaka, who was heartbroken and died when his master renounced his princely life to go in search of enlightenment. The animal was reborn in one of the Buddhist heavens and listened to sermons by Gautama Buddha. It is believed that the energetic neighing of a horse symbolizes the power of the Buddha to awaken sleepy



View of box's sides

minds to practice the Dharma; it also supports the throne of Ratnasambhāva Buddha, one of the Five Transcendental Buddhas. From an astrological standpoint, the horse is the seventh of twelve animals in the Chinese zodiac, and it is associated with the summer season and the southern direction.

Dogs have been in China even longer than horses, as evidenced by their portrayal in ancient jades, bronzes, and ceramics. In early times they were prized as hunting companions, and since the Tang dynasty they have been reared as pets, regarded as intelligent, trustworthy, and loyal. Considered a lucky sign, the dog is the eleventh animal in the Chinese zodiac, linked to autumn and the direction west-northwest. Taken together, the representation of the elephant, horse, and dog, without any human figures in sight, may also allude to a trend during the seventeenth century to set animals free as part of Buddhist beliefs.³

The charming scene on the cover is countered by a different visual aesthetic on the four sides. Perhaps most dramatic is one of the longer sides, which shows a dragonlike creature confronting a horselike animal. On closer inspection, the winged beast is revealed to be a mythological flying-fish dragon (*feiyu* 飛魚). Although its four-clawed feet and fishlike tail are concealed beneath the roiling waves, the sharp, pointed finlike wings are sufficient to establish its identity. The *feiyu* is not very frequently depicted in Chinese art except for a relatively short period of time during the middle of the Ming dynasty, due to an imperial proscription of 1459, followed later by a number of others, against the misuse of *feiyu* along with the four-clawed dragon (*mang* 蟒) and dipper ox (*douniu* 斗牛) motifs.⁴ Legend has it that the flying-fish dragon rescued a Tang scholar from drowning and took him to the heavens, where he was reborn as Tianshu 天樞 (“Celestial Pivot”), principal among the Seven Stars of the Northern Dipper (*Bei dou qi xing*



View of maker's mark on the bottom of the box

北斗七星).⁵ The horse represented here may be the mythical celestial horse (*tianma* 天馬) or the sea horse (*haima* 海馬).⁶

The other long side of the box also shows a confrontational scene. On the right is a mythical creature that appears to be either the Beast of the White Marsh (*baize* 白澤) or the *suanni* 狻猊 (also known as *jinni* 金猊 or *lingni* 靈猊), a legendary beast of prey, with flames emanating from its chest even as a huge wave engulfs the midsection of its body.⁷ At left are two smaller unidentified animals, one with a long curled snout, long pointed ears, a single hornlike projection from its head, and hooved front feet treading the tumultuous waters. Above it is the other animal, which is almost completely submerged except for part of its rump and tail.

Each of the other two sides of the box depicts a single animal whose rear half is hidden in the waves. On the short side closer to the flying-fish dragon is a Buddhist lion or lion-dog (*fo shi* 佛獅 or *shizi* 獅子), the fearless creature considered to be the guardian of the Dharma.⁸ The other short side depicts an elephant.⁹ Whether intentional or not, it serves in part to relate the decorative schemes on the sides to that on the cover, which are otherwise disparate in style.

It may be of some significance that a number of the creatures found on the sides of the box are also found in glazed tiles in the form of auspicious mythical animals often seen on the roof ridges of traditional Chinese buildings, particularly those over palatial halls and other important structures.¹⁰ They were meant to avert misfortunes and to deflect evil spirits. The roof of the Hall of Supreme Harmony (*Taihe dian* 太和殿), the most significant building in the Forbidden City in Beijing, has ten such animals on each diagonal ridge.

Technical Notes

The heavy lid and box were each assembled from five pieces; seams are visible at the corners and on the bottom of the box. The register of the decoration of the lid and bottom aligns with the lid placed in either direction. The decoration was cold-worked by carving and engraving. Different surface coatings were used to highlight various features: the waves are black, the animals are gold, and the background is brown.

Provenance

Sydney L. Moss Ltd., London, by 1991 and until 2001.

Published

Sydney L. Moss Ltd., *The Second Bronze Age: Later Chinese Metalwork*, catalogue by Paul Moss and Gerard Hawthorn (London: Sydney L. Moss Ltd., 1991), cat. no. 101.

¹ Elephants were known to dwell in the plains of North China and the Yellow River valley during the Shang dynasty, but they progressively moved to the south over time because of many environmental and human-related influences. This pattern of migration has been well documented in a monographic study by Mark Elvin, *The Retreat of the Elephants: An Environmental History of China* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004); see p. 10, map 2, for the distribution of elephants in China from 5000 B.C. to the present day.

² Indeed, one of the seven precious jewels of royal power (*saptaratna*) held by a ruler of the temporal world (*cakravartin*) is the precious white elephant of state (*hastiratna*).

³ See Joanna F. Handlin Smith, "Liberating Animals in Ming-Qing China: Buddhist Inspiration and Elite Imagination," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 58, no. 1 (February 1999), pp. 51–84.

⁴ On the *feiyu* motif in the Ming decorative arts, see Schuyler V. R. Cammann, "Some Strange Ming Beasts," *Oriental Art*, n.s. vol. 2, no. 3 (Autumn 1956), pp. 95–99; *feiyu* motifs on two Ming porcelains are illustrated on p. 96, figs. 2–3. In addition, see the vivid *feiyu* depicted on a small blue-and-white Ming porcelain jar in the Asia Society Museum, New York, with a six-character Chenghua mark and of the period (1465–1487), Jingdezhen ware, porcelain with underglaze cobalt blue decoration, Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection of Asian Art (1979.173), in Denise Patry Leidy, *Treasures of Asian Art: The Asia Society's Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection* (New York: The Asia Society Galleries; New York and London: Abbeville Press, Inc., 1994), p. 191, no. 189.

⁵ The traditional Western astronomical name of the star is Dubhe; its Bayer designation is Alpha Ursae Majoris.

⁶ For an illustration and description of the celestial horse, or *tianma*, see the *Niaoshou* 鳥獸 ("Birds and Beasts") section, *juan* 4, folio 29b, of Wang Qi and Wang Siyi, comps., *San cai tu hui* (106 *juan*), completed 1607, first published 1609; reprint ed. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1988), vol. 3, p. 2235. For an illustration and description of the sea horse, or *haima*, see the *Niaoshou* section, *juan* 3, folio 5a-b, reprint ed., vol. 3, p. 2202. Based on the illustrations in this late Ming encyclopedia, the horselike animal depicted on this box is more likely to be the sea horse and not the celestial horse, though both are symbolic of constancy, righteousness, and courage.

⁷ On the *baize*, see Cammann, "Some Strange Ming Beasts," pp. 101–102. For an illustration and description of the *suanni*, see the *Niaoshou* section, *juan* 3, folio 3a-b, of Wang and Wang, comps., *San cai tu hui*, reprint ed., vol. 3, p. 2201.

⁸ A detailed discussion of the Buddhist lion is also given within this catalogue, in cat. no. 2 on the object entitled *Covered Censer in the Form of a Lion-Dog*.

⁹ For an illustration and description of the elephant, or *xiang* 象, see the *Niaoshou* section, *juan* 3, folio 8a-b, of Wang and Wang, comps., *San cai tu hui*, reprint ed., vol. 3, p. 2204.

¹⁰ The largest of such assemblies would include the dragon (*long* 龍), the phoenix (*feng* 鳳), the lion (*shizi* 獅子), the celestial horse (*tianma* 天馬), the sea horse (*haima* 海馬), a legendary beast of prey (*suanni* 狻猊, also known as *jinni* 金猊 or *lingni* 靈猊) that ate tigers and leopards, a dragon-bodied and fish-tailed monster (*yayu* 押魚), a legendary horned animal (*xiezhi* 饕餮), the dipper ox (*douniu* 斗牛), and a mythical beast that walks upright (*xingshi* 行什).

No. 11

龍首平底銅匜

Pouring Vessel with Dragon-Head Spout

Ming dynasty (1368–1644) or Qing dynasty (1644–1911), 15th–18th century

Cast bronze with remnants of a tinted surface coating;

height 7.3 cm, width 26.6 cm, depth 17.5 cm

Collection of Robert E. Kresko



This pouring vessel's body takes the form of a squat circular basin whose rounded sides turn in slightly toward the rolled lip. The vessel is supported on a low, flat-bottomed pedestal, whose depth is visible as the sunken center of the interior. Also visible on one of the interior walls is an opening that leads into the spout, which is represented as the head and neck of a dragon. On the opposite end, there is a handle in the form of a dragon's tail, which emerges near the rim, curves back, and attaches to the vessel near its bottom, with the tip tightly curling outward again. There is no maker's mark of any kind on the object.



View of interior with spout opening

The very simple form of the vessel's body derives in part from certain ancient bronze wine and water containers of the Eastern Zhou dynasty (c.771–221 B.C.). One example is an oval-mouthed, globular-bodied, and flat-bottomed wine vessel with dragon-shaped ears in the Hubei Provincial Museum, Wuhan.¹ Another such wine vessel of similar form, but with a much simpler pair of loop handles, is in the Yichang Museum.² The popularity of this vessel type extends into the Warring States period (c.475–221 B.C.), by which time it is known as *yi* 匜. It is well represented by a bronze spouted water vessel with the inscription *Wangzi yi* 王子匜 in the National Palace Museum, Taipei, that dates to the early sixth or late fifth century B.C. The square spout suggests the mouth of an animal while the handle appears to be formed by a composite animal shape.³ The form of the Kresko vessel may also have been partially influenced by metalwork of later periods, particularly that of the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127).⁴

The use of the dragon's head and tail as functional decoration on the present vessel is appropriate considering the strong associations of Chinese dragons with water in popular tradition. Dragons are believed to rule moving bodies of water, such as waterfalls, rivers, seas, and oceans. According to legend, they are able to manifest themselves as water spouts or twisters over water, and they are thought to be able to control water-related weather phenomena, especially life-giving and crop-nourishing rain. In this context, such a vessel would have been well employed for rituals in a temple dedicated to the local "dragon king," particularly if the village or town was located close to the sea or a large body of water. Sacrificial rites conducted to appease the dragon in times of flooding or drought, or simply in the hope of averting such occurrences, would require the use of pouring vessels.

Dating this vessel is difficult because there is no decoration except for the spout and handle. These small areas of detailing provide a clue to the date of manufacture, but they are not extensive enough to point to a conclusive date or reign period. There are incidental resemblances to the physiognomy and scaling of dragons found on carved jades, textiles, lacquerware, and other decorative arts of the Ming and Qing dynasties (from the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries).⁵ However, for an evidently non-imperial vessel of this kind, the representational styles of dragons may not have changed over a considerable period of time, particularly if the piece had been made far from the capital or other major metropolitan centers where the visual expression of a highly specific period style would not have been as critical or necessary.

Technical Notes

It appears that the bowl and the dragon were integrally cast; the dragon head serves as a spout. The exterior of the vessel is nicely finished, with minimal cold-working of cast details.

Provenance

Ulrich Hausmann, Nottingham, England, until 1999; Sydney L. Moss Ltd., London, 1999.

Published

Sydney L. Moss Ltd., *Escape from the Dusty World: Chinese Paintings and Literati Works of Art* (London: Sydney L. Moss Ltd., 1999), pp. 360–61 and p. 363, cat. no. 111.

¹ The name of this vessel type is *he*; the character, previously unknown in the Chinese lexicon but discovered to exist in inscribed bronze vessels of this period, is written as a combination of the characters *jin* 金, functioning as the radical, and *he* 和 being the phonetic element; the combined character is pronounced *he*. The vessel was recovered in 1974 from the Chu 楚 tomb at Shanwan 山灣, Xiangyang 襄陽 district, Xiangfan 襄樊, Hubei province; Spring and Autumn period (771–c.475 B.C.), Hubei Provincial Museum, Wuhan, in Xianggang Zhongwen daxue wenwu guan (Art Museum, The Chinese University of Hong Kong), *Jiangnan diqu xian Qin wenming (Pre-Qin Civilization in the Jiangnan Region)* [Hong Kong: Xianggang Zhongwen daxue wenwu guan (Art Museum, The Chinese University of Hong Kong), 1999], p. 91, cat. no. 45 (illustration), and pp. 155–56, cat. no. 45 (cat. entry by Zhang Yinwu).

² Excavated in 1975 from the Chu tomb at Caojiagang 曹家崗, Dangyang 當陽, Yichang 宜昌, Hubei province; Spring and Autumn period (771–c.475 B.C.), in *ibid.*, p. 97, cat. no. 53 (illustration), and p. 160, cat. no. 53 (cat. entry by Li Meitian).

³ *Zhong tong* 中銅 00726, in Wen C. Fong and James C. Y. Watt, *Possessing the Past: Treasures from the National Palace Museum, Taipei* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1996), p. 80, pl. 44.

⁴ A lavish example of a related type of Northern Song metalwork is a cup formerly in the collection of Dr. Carl Kempe (1884–1967) in Ekolsund, Sweden. Found in 1924 in Shaanxi province, the eleventh-century beaten gold cup is hemispherical in form and has an everted foot rim, a lip, and a handle in the form of a dragon's head; a movable ring is held in the dragon's mouth. See Bo Gyllensvärd, *Chinese Gold & Silver in the Carl Kempe Collection: A Catalogue by Bo Gyllensvärd* (Stockholm: Nordisk Rotogravyr, 1953), pp. 110–11, cat. no. 53A; Smithsonian Institution, *Chinese Gold & Silver in the Carl Kempe Collection* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1954), p. 18, cat. no. 53A (illustration), and p. 23, cat. no. 53A; and Bo Gyllensvärd, *Chinese Gold, Silver, and Porcelain: The Kempe Collection* (New York: The Asia Society, Inc., 1971), pp. 34–35, cat. no. 22 (caption and illustration), and pp. 72–73, cat. no. 22a (descriptive text).

⁵ See, for instance, numerous examples of Ming and Qing dragons illustrated in Yang Xin, Li Yihua, and Xu Naixiang, *The Art of the Dragon* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1988), pp. 97–211.

No. 12

躺臥鵝喉羚望月銅鏡座

Mirror Stand in the Form of a Recumbent Djeiran

Ming dynasty (1368–1644), early 17th century

Cast bronze with remnants of a tinted coating; height 11.4 cm, width 18.1 cm

Collection of Robert E. Kresko

This bronze takes the form of a recumbent, gentle-looking animal whose head with a short beard is turned back and looking up over its own shoulder at a crescent moon seemingly supported by a spray of clouds. The animal's shoulders and haunches are embellished with tongues of flame in low relief. The bronze's function was to hold a mirror, which would have been inserted in the recessed space between the billowing clouds and the moon. There may or may not have been a mirror that was made to match the stand, but in any case, when a round mirror was placed in the proper position, the *djeiran* would appear to be gazing at a full moon. The cloud forms appear similar to those found on porcelains and lacquerware of the Wanli (1573–1619) through Chongzhen periods (1628–1644), and it is on this basis that the object is assigned a late Ming date.

In traditional Chinese literature, the visual composition of such mirror stands was described by the phrase *xiniu wang yue* 犧牛望月 (“rhinoceros gazing at the moon”) as early as the Zhou dynasty (c.1050–221 B.C.); legend had it that the curved profile of the rhinoceros horn was derived from the form of the crescent moon.¹ The grouping is alternatively known as *qilin wang yue* 麒麟望月 (“*qilin* gazing at the moon”) because the mythical beast known as the *qilin* is represented on rare occasions; however, the phrase is often used erroneously when the *qilin* is not the animal rendered.

There has long been confusion about the animal represented in this and so many other bronze works. James Watt and Anne Wardwell, through their careful study of a similar motif found in Chinese and Central Asian textiles, ceramics, and metalwork, were the first to convincingly identify the animal as a *djeiran*.² Their argument has been significantly strengthened by Linda Komaroff and Stefano Carboni, who offered additional cultural explanations for the confusion between the unicorn and an animal like the *djeiran*: “In Islamic bestiaries and cosmographies, the rhinoceros is one of several creatures with a single horn; these include gazelle- or antelopelike animals with their heads seen in profile—two horns becoming one—such as the *harish* and the *shah-davar*. Such antecedents probably contributed to the lore and myth of the unicorn that later developed in Europe.”³

All the above-mentioned scholars refer to the *djeiran* parenthetically as the Central Asian antelope, but it is more accurately described as the goitered gazelle (in Chinese, *ehou ling* 鵝喉羚 or *deng ling* 瞪羚).⁴ The customary references to *xiniu* and *qilin* are thus equally



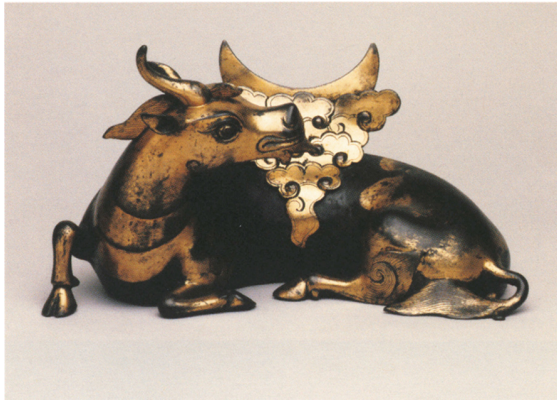


Fig.4: Mirror stand in the form of a recumbent *djeiran*; Northern Song (960–1127), Jin (1115–1234), or Yuan (1279–1368) dynasty, 12th–14th century; gilt bronze; length 27 cm; © Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Salting Bequest (M.737-1910).

untenable, though they may persist in Chinese for some time because of unfamiliarity with a more proper term. However, the misleading English translations, including “rhinoceros” and “unicorn,” should not be perpetuated.

One of the oldest surviving works depicting a *djeiran* is a late seventh-century Sogdian silver bowl in the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia. The lobed vessel is in the form of a twelve-petal flower, with a central medallion depicting a recumbent *djeiran* before a tree.⁵ The earliest known Chinese works of art containing representa-

tions of the *djeiran* date to the Jin dynasty (1115–1234). They are also commonly seen in Jin ceramics, metalwork (e.g., on the backs of bronze mirrors), and textiles.⁶ This posture of the *djeiran*, as well as the combination of clouds and moon, is transmitted through the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) and preserved in later periods.⁷

The best-known mirror stand in the form of a recumbent *djeiran* that may date to the Northern Song, Jin, or Yuan (twelfth through fourteenth centuries) is a gilt bronze example in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (Fig. 4).⁸ During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the faunal repertoire for mirror stands expanded to include recumbent *qilin*, oxen, and rabbits, all displaying the same turning of the head to gaze at the moon.⁹ One of the most extensive collections of such mirror stands from late imperial China, exhibited in 2001 at the National Museum of History, Taipei, contains no fewer than fourteen examples, eleven from the Ming and three from the Qing. All are bronze or gilt bronze, except for a stone one from the Ming and a ceramic one from the Qing. Ten of the stands feature a rhinoceros, with two *qilin* and two oxen making up the rest. In every case, the animals are postured as if gazing at the moon rising over their backs.¹⁰

It is not difficult to understand why such mirror stands like the Kresko bronze enjoyed widespread popularity for centuries. The ingenious and practical design, coupled with the charming visual qualities of a recumbent animal, would have appealed to men and women, young and old, whether cultured or plebeian. They were portable, suitable as gifts, and a poetic reminder of the beauty of the rising moon, with or without the presence of the mirrors they were designed to support.

Technical Notes

The *djeiran* was integrally cast, including its horn, ears, and tail. It is assumed that the crescent was attached separately, but visual examination alone does not confirm this. Details of decoration were included in the cast. The stand is not highly finished, and casting flaws were left unrepaired. Remnants of a heavy black coating suggest the flaws would have been obscured by the coating.

Exhibited

"In the Shadow of Dragons: The Robert Kresko Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes," The Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas, Texas, March 7–September 9, 2001.

¹ He Li, *Chinese Ceramics: A New Comprehensive Guide from the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1996), p. 262, pl. 509.

² James C. Y. Watt and Anne E. Wardwell, *When Silk Was Gold: Central Asian and Chinese Textiles* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, in cooperation with Cleveland: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1997), pp. 114–15, cat. no. 29.

³ Linda Komaroff and Stefano Carboni, eds., *The Legacy of Genghis Khan: Courtly Art and Culture in Western Asia, 1256–1353* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 285–86, cat. no. 195.

⁴ Subspecies include *Gazella subgutturosa subgutturosa* (Persian or goitered gazelle), which once ranged from eastern Turkey through Iran, Pakistan, and Central Asia; *Gazella subgutturosa yarkandensis* (Xinjiang goitered gazelle), found in the deserts of the Tarim Basin in Xinjiang, China; and *Gazella subgutturosa hilleriana* (Mongolian goitered gazelle), native to the Gobi Desert and the Qaidam Basin.

⁵ Found in 1936 near Cherdyn in the Ural region; see State Hermitage Museum, *The State Hermitage: Masterpieces from the Museum's Collections* (London: Booth-Clibborn Editions, 1994), vol. 1, p. 431, cat. no. 418 ("Cup with a Gazelle"). For a line drawing showing the design, see Watt and Wardwell, *When Silk Was Gold*, p. 114, fig. 47.

⁶ See, for instance, a pottery shard with design of a *djeiran* gazing at the moon, excavated from the Ding ware kilns in Quyang county, Hebei province, in Jan C. Wirgin, "Sung Ceramic Designs," *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities*, no. 42 (1970), fig. 32:8; and a dish with a foliated rim and design of a *djeiran* gazing at the moon, Ding ware, porcelain with incised decoration, The British Museum, Oppenheim Bequest (OA 1947.7–12.61), in Regina Krahl, "Mediaeval Silks Woven in Gold: Khitan, Jürchen, Tangut, Chinese or Mongol?" *Orientations*, vol. 28, no. 4 (April 1997),

p. 47, fig. 5. One of the best Jin examples is a brocaded tabby fragment in the Cleveland Museum of Art with gold against a red ground ("Djeiran with Floral Branches and Moon"), Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund (1991.4), in Watt and Wardwell, *When Silk Was Gold*, pp. 114–15, cat. no. 29; and Komaroff and Carboni, eds., *The Legacy of Genghis Khan*, p. 68, fig. 66, and p. 282, cat. no. 179. Each brocaded unit shows a recumbent *djeiran* among plants and flowers, gazing at a full moon supported by scrolling clouds. The Musée Guimet, Paris, has another fragment with the same design (MA 10986; AEDTA 3108); see Krahl, "Mediaeval Silks Woven in Gold," p. 47, fig. 3.

⁷ See a plate with sixteen-foliate panels, Yuan or Ming, thirteenth to fifteenth century, Longquan ware, stoneware with carved and mold-stamped decoration, and green glaze, Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, Avery Brundage Collection (B60 P1714), in He, *Chinese Ceramics*, p. 246, pl. 509 (illustration), and p. 262, pl. 509 (descriptive text).

⁸ Salting Bequest (M.737–1910), in Rose Kerr, *Later Chinese Bronzes* (London: Bamboo Publishing Ltd., in association with London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1990), p. 101, pl. 87; Rose Kerr, ed., *Chinese Art and Design: The T. T. Tsui Gallery of Chinese Art* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1991), pp. 142–43, no. 60; and Komaroff and Carboni, eds., *The Legacy of Genghis Khan*, p. 114, fig. 46.

⁹ Notable Ming bronze animal-gazing-at-the-moon mirror stands include a late fourteenth-century example in the Museo d'Arte Cinese ed Etnografico, Parma, in Giuseppe M. Toscano, *Arte e cultura cinese* (Parma, Italy: Artegrafica Silva, 1984), p. 62, fig. 68; a sixteenth- to early seventeenth-century one in the Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst, Vienna (inv. no. Br 1442), in Arne Eggebrecht, ed., *China, eine Wiege der Weltkultur: 5000 Jahre Erfindungen und Entdeckungen* (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1994), cat. nos. 174–75; a Ming gilt bronze mirror stand in the form of a recumbent rabbit, in Yu Jincheng and Song Dachuan, comps., *Ming Qing tongqi Beijing wenwu jingcui daxi: Qingtong qi juan* (*Gems of Beijing Cultural Relics Series: Bronzes*) [Beijing: Beijing chubanshe (Beijing Publishing House), 2002], illus. section, pp. 244–45, no. 273, and text section, p. 28, no. 273. The Cleveland Museum of Art has two Qing bronze mirror stands, one in the shape of a *djeiran* (1995.385) and the other in the shape of an ox (1995.386); both objects credited as Gift of Drs. Thomas and Martha Carter in Honor of Sherman E. Lee.

¹⁰ Guoli lishi bowu guan bianji weiyuan hui (National Museum of History), *Jingyue chenghua: Xi zhai cang jing: Wang Du tongjing zhencang ce* (*Clarified Beauty of Bronze Mirrors: Wellington Wang Collection*) [Taipei: Guoli lishi bowu guan (National Museum of History), 2001], pp. 220–32, cat. nos. 224–37.



No. 13

舞中西域人物形銅投壺

Arrow Vase in the Form of a Dancing Figure

Ming dynasty (1368–1644), Wanli period (1573–1619) through Chongzhen period (1628–1644), first half of the 17th century

Cast bronze with wire, with a tinted coating; height 41 cm

Saint Louis Art Museum, partial and promised gift of Robert E. Kresko

25:2005

This extraordinary bronze is an arrow vase (*touhu* 投壺) in the form of a dancing figure. The man is balanced on his right foot on a square, balustraded platform with openwork decoration; the platform is raised on a two-level pedestal with a smaller openwork tier and a larger corner-footed tier with bracketed aprons. What appears to be two fruit-picker's baskets are tied together in a "figure 8" formation, strung across the upper back and shoulders. The figure has large round eyes, high cheekbones, and tightly curled brows, beard, and bits of hair at the temples and the back of the head, all of which indicate some kind of Central Asian origin. He is shown with his left foot raised and his left hand holding an octagonal tambourine.¹ His right arm is bent at the elbow with the hand held in front of the chest, ready to strike on the tambourine, which has small round movable metal jingles set into the frame on each of the eight sides, thereby simulating an actual instrument. The man is portrayed in the midst of a rhythmic dance; the lower portion of his calf-length robe appears to swirl about, as do the two ends of an embroidered girdle tied around his waist. The robe is decorated with a finely incised floral pattern and the cut edges are detailed with narrow borders. The figure's head is cut off at the level of the forehead, the cavity within forming the central opening of the arrow vase, while the baskets act as the side containers.

The physiognomy and dress of the figure suggest that he represents a Uighur, Uzbek, or Kazakh, all Central Asian peoples whose cultural homelands lie to the northwest of China proper. However, the octagonal tambourine that he holds has its roots in either Mongolia or Manchuria, which are to the north and northeast, respectively.² This discrepancy may be due to the Chinese bronze artisan not fully understanding the cultural differences between various non-Han Chinese ethnic groups.

Figural representations of foreign peoples have been part of the Chinese artistic repertoire since the establishment of the ancient Silk Road. There are numerous examples in ceramics, bronzes, stone carving, and pictorial art.³ Some bronzes from the Tang dynasty (618–907) depict Central Asian people, some of whom are shown dancing.⁴ Among Ming bronzes, there is a striking figure of a dancing Central Asian in the Field Museum, Chicago, acquired by the sinologist Berthold Laufer (1874–1934) in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, in



Detail of upper portion of the arrow vase seen from the rear

1908 or 1909.⁵ During the Ming dynasty, Muslims thrived in China; both Beijing and Nanjing, the imperial and auxiliary capitals respectively, were centers for Islamic learning. Those who lived in the metropolitan areas tended to become sinicized over time, so that the outfit seen on the Kresko figure would most likely have been worn by a Central Asian in a more rural setting. Likewise, the fruit-picking baskets he carries point to an agricultural lifestyle. It is also possible that the figure represents someone who merely donned traditional costume for a performance.

Figural arrow vases of the kind discussed here were already an established part of the *touhu* design typology by the sixteenth century. The early seventeenth-century *San cai tu hui* 《三才圖會》 (Collected Illustrations of the Three Realms), probably the most influential woodblock-printed work of its kind, illustrates a selection of twenty arrow vases, and one of these portrays a dancer perched on one foot and supporting three cylindrical tubes on his head.⁶ But such *touhu* do not seem to have survived in great numbers. Today, arrow vases in the form of human figures are rare, but those depicting Central Asians are even rarer.⁷ The unusual *touhu* illustrated in the late Ming encyclopedia has five openings for receiving arrows—one being the top of the head, two being cylinders rope-tied to his body, and the remaining two being cylinders held in his hands.

This splendid example from the Kresko collection may be considered a deluxe version of an arrow vase, having been provided with such an elaborate and attractive support. In fact, it may have been used less often for its intended purpose than as a piece of decorative art. The dynamic style of the figure, which is asymmetrically poised yet visually balanced, coupled with the fine architectural detailing on the tiered pedestal, strongly suggest a late Ming, early seventeenth-century date.

Technical Notes

The hollow dancing figure with his baskets was integrally cast with minimal cold-working. The tambourine and one castanet were cast and attached to the figure. The remaining castanets are movable and are individually secured with wire pins. The platform and base were each cast separately and joined, as a seam between the two attests. An extension from the bottom of one foot of the figure is inserted into a cutout on the platform and presumably is secured to its underside, which is obscured by a sheet of an unknown material. The piece shows many unrepaired casting flaws and unfinished areas.

Provenance

Sydney L. Moss Ltd., London, by 1991; James M. Hennen, Lookout Mountain, Tennessee, until 1999; Sydney L. Moss Ltd., London, 1999–2001; Collection of Robert E. Kresko, St. Louis, 2001–2005.

Published

Sydney L. Moss Ltd., *The Second Bronze Age: Later Chinese Metalwork* (London: Sydney L. Moss Ltd., 1991), cat. no. 20; Sydney L. Moss Ltd., *Escape from the Dusty World: Chinese Paintings and Literati Works of Art* (London: Sydney L. Moss Ltd., 1999), pp. 372–73, cat. no. 114.

¹ The tambourine is a percussion instrument of Persian origin; its name in English derives from the Middle Persian *tambūr*, meaning “lute” or “drum,” by way of the Middle French word *tambour*.

² The tambourine is known in Chinese as *bajiao gu* 八角鼓 (“eight-cornered drum”) or *bafang gu* 八方鼓 (“eight-sided drum”). In China (as well as Mongolia and Manchuria) it is invariably octagonal, not round as is mostly the case elsewhere, and it usually has snake-skin stretched across the playing surface.

³ For instance, a dancer and four musicians from Central Asia are depicted in the molded decoration of four glazed earthenware “pilgrim flasks” (*bianhu* 扁壺) excavated in 1971 from the tomb of Fan Cui 范粹 (d. 575) at Anyang 安陽, Henan province. The tomb is dated to 576; the flasks are Northern Qi dynasty (550–577), mid-sixth century, brown-glazed earthenware decorated in molded relief, Henan Museum, Zhengzhou, Henan province. See Henan sheng bowu

guan, “Henan Anyang Bei Qi Fan Cui mu fajue jianbao,” *Wenwu* (Cultural Relics), no. 188 (1972, no. 1), p. 49 and pl. 7; Annette L. Juliano and Judith A. Lerner, *Monks and Merchants: Silk Road Treasures from Northwest China, Gansu and Ningxia, 4th–7th Century* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., with New York: The Asia Society, 2001), p. 252, fig. C; and James C. Y. Watt et al., *China: Dawn of a Golden Age, 200–750 AD* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 250–51, cat. no. 149.

⁴ A well-known example is a lively bronze dancing figure found near Shandan 山丹, Gansu province, identified as a Sogdian from his tall peaked hat, costume, and prominent nose; Tang dynasty, seventh to eighth century, Gansu Provincial Museum, Lanzhou, in Juliano and Lerner, *Monks and Merchants*, pp. 254–55, cat. no. 82; and Watt et al., *China: Dawn of a Golden Age*, p. 251, cat. no. 150. Like the Kresko figure, he is shown balanced on one foot, with the other leg raised, and both arms gesturing under long sleeves. Sogdiana was located in what is present-day Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, and Sogdians were celebrated for their dancing at the Tang court in Chang’an 長安 (modern Xi’an 西安).

⁵ “Figure of a dancing Muhammedan,” acquired in 1908 or 1909, Field Museum, Chicago (cat. no. 117697), in Berthold Laufer, “Chinese Muhammedan Bronzes, with a Study of the Arabic Inscriptions by Martin Sprengling,” *Ars Islamica*, vol. 1, pt. 2 (1934), p. 144, fig. 12.

⁶ See the *Renshi* 人事 (“Human Affairs”) section, *juan* 10, folios 26a–30b, of Wang Qi and Wang Siyi, comps., *San cai tu hui* (106 *juan*), completed 1607, first published 1609; reprint ed. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1988), vol. 2, pp. 1785–87; the figural arrow vase is the fourteenth depicted and is illustrated on folio 29a (p. 1787, top register, second from the right), under the heading *you zhong* 有終.

⁷ Among the very few known examples is one depicting a man and a lion-dog that was exhibited in London in 1995: Ming dynasty, sixteenth century, cast and chased bronze, height 43.1 cm, in The Oriental Art Gallery Limited, *Oriental Works of Art: Opening Monday, 12th June 1995* (London: The Oriental Art Gallery Limited, 1995), cat. no. 40.



No. 14

帶佛獅鈕開光番蓮紋蓋雙螭龍耳壽字紋三足鼎式香爐

Tripod Censer with Chi-Dragon Handles and Lion-Dog Knob on

Openwork Cover

Ming dynasty (1368–1644) or Qing dynasty (1644–1911), 17th century

Cast bronze with cold-working, with induced surface color;

height 52.1 cm, width 43.2 cm

Saint Louis Art Museum, Partial and promised gift of Robert E. Kresko

8:2005a,b

This imposing censer has a compressed globular body with bulging sides, a flattened base, and a short-waisted neck that flares out to the wide, flat mouth rim. It is supported by three sturdy cabriole legs, which are hollow cast and open to the vessel's interior. The exterior face of each leg has low-relief decoration of a stylized *shou* 壽 ("longevity") character on a background of delicate leafy scrolls. Perched on either side of the mouth rim are two dramatically postured *chi*-dragons, whose clawed feet grip the vessel's lip. The dragons' bodies, oriented to face in opposite directions, are coiled in almost complete circles, with strands of their trifurcated tails gracefully curling onto the censer's shoulders. The base has a countersunk rectangle; it has a six-character apocryphal reign mark reading *Da Ming Xuande nian zhi* 大明宣德年製 ("Made in the Xuande era of the Great Ming").

The cover is shaped like an upside-down bowl, with a low foot ring that allows it to fit securely within the mouth of the censer. Above the lower register of the dome is a wide openwork band with an intricate design of lotus scrolls. Capping the dome is a solid circular panel with the same lotus scroll design in low relief under a large leaf with pointed tip and scalloped edges. The leaf is surmounted by a Buddhist lion-dog, seated on its haunches, its head turned to the left and gazing straight out, mouth open to reveal both rows of teeth, ears pulled back and turned down, its mane divided into neat groups of curls over the head and along the spine, and the bushy, flamelike tail turned upward. Its raised front left leg would have been placed on a ball, now missing.

The vogue for lion-dogs on incense burners can be traced back to at least the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368). Among the surviving examples is a small bronze tripod censer with two side-handles recovered from the wreckage of a Chinese cargo ship that sank around 1325 near Sinan, off the coast of Korea, while en route to Japan. That censer's cover has a Buddhist lion-dog seated on a ground of floral scrolls that forms part of the domed cover.¹ Chinese censers with this type of design had a market in Japan during the Kamakura period (1185–1333), where lion-dogs would have been known as *shishi* 獅子 ("lion"), *karajishi* 唐獅子 ("Chinese lion"), or *komainu* 狛犬 ("Goguryeo dog"), the last term being derived from the ancient northern Korean kingdom of Goguryeo 高句麗 (37 B.C.–A.D. 668), where they were also thought by the Japanese to have been found.²

The compressed bombé form of this censer's body and the robust *chi*-dragon handles are strong features associated with incense burners believed to be from the Xuande period (1426–1435). Stout cabriole feet were already characteristic of some Ming porcelain censers of the period, while heavy cabriole feet combined with a bombé body may be seen on bronze tripod censers of the Chenghua period (1465–1487). One of these, in the Etnografiska Museet (Museum of Ethnography), Stockholm, is very large and precisely dated to 1481 through a twelve-character inscription on the rim, while a small gold- and silver-inlaid one in the Musée Cernuschi, Paris, has an eight-character inscription indicating the reign period.³

The boldness of the censer's form is brilliantly counterbalanced by the delicacy of the openwork decoration on the cover's central register. The style of the flowers, leaves, and scrolled stems is typical of late Ming and early Qing visual vocabulary.⁴ Such decoration may also be found on porcelain, textiles, cloisonné enamel, and other decorative works through much of the seventeenth century. The same lightness and fluidity of line can be seen on the scrolling forms that make up the backdrop for the *shou* characters on the three cabriole feet. This unusually successful combination of restraint and flourish is rarer after the seventeenth century, when designs for large censers became increasingly strained and baroque in character, with extravagant, complex forms and ornamentation.

The Kresko censer and its cover appear to have suffered some trauma in the past. One side of the body's surface has visibly dented areas. The cover's openwork decoration shows small losses, and the ball once attached to the large leaf on top of the cover and under the lion-dog's paws has disappeared. Nevertheless, the object still retains an air of dignity and a commanding presence. The striking combination of undecorated surfaces and highly sculptural forms, the bold juxtaposition of solid and void, and the attractive color of corroded metal make it one of the most remarkable censers of the seventeenth century.



Detail showing one of the censer's tripod feet



Side view of the censer showing one of the handles



View of apocryphal reign mark on the base of the censer's body

Technical Notes

The censer has a superficial but genuine layer of green corrosion over an induced brown patina. The cover and censer fit snugly together. As a whole, the censer and cover combine very fine cast details with well-executed cold-carving.

Censer: The *chi*-dragon handles were separately cast and attached (four rivets are visible on the interior); a fill material was used to close the gaps between the figures and the vessel. There are patches of a plasterlike fill material on the bottom of the interior over the three legs, perhaps to cover mold material; the legs appear to be integrally cast with the bowl. The *chi*-dragons are nicely finished on all sides and show evidence of cold-carving (e.g., on the faces). The decoration on the three legs was cold-carved. The inscription on the underside was cast (evident by the texture of the background, the presence of extraneous material, and the lack of tool marks).

Cover: It appears the lion-dog was cast onto the cover, although there is a rivet in the proper left rear leg. There is a hole on the interior that would allow egress of smoke through the lion-dog and out its mouth; however, the lion-dog's head is filled with casting material, preventing this. The ball under the foot of the lion (now missing) would have been cast and added separately, attached by rivets (heads extant). Some small areas of rust are visible on the interior and the exterior of the cover and censer, suggesting that iron pins were used in casting. It appears that a loosely woven textile was used to make the fine impression in the background of the upper, solid part of the cover. Some evidence of cold-working can be seen on the lion-dog, along with minimal carving of cast details.

Provenance

Kaikodo America, Inc., New York, until 1998; Collection of Robert E. Kresko, St. Louis, 1998–2005.

Published

Kaikodo, "A Garden Show," *Kaikodo Journal*, vol. 9 (Autumn 1998), pp. 174–75 and p. 260, cat. no. 70.

Exhibited

"In the Shadow of Dragons: The Robert Kresko Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes," The Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas, Texas, March 7–September 9, 2001.

¹ The censer, excavated in 1976 or 1977 with a large number of other Yuan artifacts, is published in Bureau of Cultural Properties, Ministry of Culture and Information, comp., *Relics Salvaged from the Seabed off Sinan: Materials I* (Seoul: Dong Hwa Publishing Co., 1985), p. 171, pl. 231 (illustration), and p. 253, pl. 231, no. 2 (catalogue entry), and illustrated in Kaikodo, "A Garden Show," *Kaikodo Journal*, vol. 9 (Autumn 1998), p. 174, fig. 1.

² For a study of the lion-dog in the religious and decorative arts of China, Tibet, and Japan, see Elsie P. Mitchell, *The Lion-Dog of Buddhist Asia* (New York and Renens, Switzerland: Fugaisha, 1991). In addition to their frequent appearance on Japanese bronzes, lion-dogs were also especially popular on the covers of ceramic censers in Japan, such as in Hirado ware, which was produced from the mid-seventeenth century through the early twentieth century.

³ For the Stockholm censer, see Sheila Riddell, *Dated Chinese Antiquities, 600–1650* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber Limited, 1979), p. 136, pl. 123; and Kaikodo, "A Garden Show," p. 260, fig. 3. For the Paris censer (M.C. 171; legs Henri Cernuschi, 1896), see *The Arts of the Ming Dynasty: An Exhibition Organised by The Arts Council of Great Britain and The Oriental Ceramic Society* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain; London: The Oriental Ceramic Society, 1958), p. 76, cat. no. 285 (descriptive text), and pl. 77, cat. no. 285 (illustration); R. Soame Jenyns and William Watson, *Chinese Art II: Gold, Silver, Later Bronzes, Cloisonne, Cantonese Enamel, Lacquer, Furniture, Wood*, rev. ed. (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1980), p. 94, no. 60; and Gilles Béguin, ed., *Arts de l'Asie au musée Cernuschi* (Paris: Éditions des musées de la Ville de Paris; Paris: Éditions Findakly, 2000), pp. 146–47 (illustration and descriptive text) and pp. 206–207 (checklist entry).

⁴ The openwork decoration on the cover is very similar to that on a late Ming, early seventeenth-century bronze covered incense burner of quatrefoil-lobed form recently exhibited in London. See Gerard Hawthorn Ltd., *Oriental Works of Art: Summer 2007* (London: Gerard Hawthorn Ltd., 2007), cat. no. 2. See also a variant style in an early Qing, late seventeenth-century bronze censer with bombé body with relief decoration of pairs of phoenixes confronting medallions, *chi*-dragon handles, openwork cover with design of stylized dragons, and knob with three seated phoenixes, in Sotheby's New York, *Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art*, Sale 6370, December 1–2, 1992, lot no. 204.



No. 15

太微垣天市垣八卦紋銅米斗

Daoist Ritual Vessel

Ming dynasty (1368–1644) or Qing dynasty (1644–1911), 16th–18th century

Cast bronze with cast and cold-worked decoration, with a pigmented coating over an induced surface color;

height 29.2 cm, width 24.4 cm

Saint Louis Art Museum, Partial and promised gift of Robert E. Kresko

17:2005

This unusual object is a Daoist ritual implement known as *mi dou* 米斗, meaning “rice bushel.” The heavenly constellations, auspicious symbols, and the sun and the moon, which are represented on the vessel, are all important aspects of Daoism, a belief system that had a great following in the Ming and Qing dynasties.

The vessel is square in cross-section with slightly reentrant corners. Two round lugs with slightly convex end surfaces protrude from either side, one having the image of a rooster and the other a hare, which are representations of the sun and the moon respectively. Each lug is set against a background of stylized swirling clouds. The body rests on a low, spreading square foot similar in cross-section to the mouth of the vessel. A six-character mark on the base, reading *Tianyi shanren dantang* 天一山人丹堂, may be translated as “Alchemical Hall of the Mountain Man of Heaven and One.”¹ It is replete with references to classic Daoist notions of alchemy, reclusion, phenomenology, and numerology.

Multiple meanings may be ascribed to the name of the vessel type. The character *dou* 斗 (“bushel”), whose original form was a simple square like the four-sided rice measure and a symbol of the Chinese empire, also refers to the Dipper constellation, which numbered eighth among the twenty-eight constellations in the sky. According to Chinese astrology, this constellation is believed to control destiny; its name is associated with the “full measure” of justice, mercy, and virtue to which every person is entitled without regard to his or her station in life. As noted by Kristofer M. Schipper, an eminent scholar of Daoism, the image of the Dipper

is engraved on swords to scare off demons; as a receptacle filled with rice, the dipper is a pure and purifying container where ritual instruments and sacred writings are placed and preserved to protect them against evil influences. The bushel...is also the ritual measure for offerings, or pledges of faithfulness, brought by the faithful; the bushel filled with rice grains can also be used as a base for the votive oil lamps that symbolize the stars of fate and vital energy; the central Pole Star of the Big Dipper (i.e., ‘Bushel’) constellation is represented in the flaming pearl that shines from the Great Master’s crown; bushel is the symbolic name given to the belly and the womb, center of the body.



Rear view of the vessel



View of mark on the base of the vessel

Schipper concludes thus: “The bushel stands symbolically for an exact measure, a closed space, and a perfect standard; transposed in the sky as a constellation, the Bushel (Big Dipper) is a heavenly clock marking the cycle of the seasons by its rotation.”²

This vessel would have been used in Daoist rituals honoring the Dipper Mother (*Dou mu*; in Chinese, 斗母 or 斗姆 or 斗姥, literally “Mother of the Rice Measure”).³ When half-filled with rice and embedded with various ritual implements, the *mi dou* would have been the central object of a ceremony that ensured longevity and affluence. The wide lip of the vessel is decorated with the Eight Trigrams (*ba gua* 八卦) of Daoism.⁴ The front of the vessel is the side that shows the most important and recognizable trigrams *qian* 乾 (☰, representing heaven and the northwest direction) and *kun* 坤 (☷, representing earth and the southwest direction). Within a cartouche below is the representation of the celestial region known as the Supreme Palace Enclosure (*Taiwei yuan* 太微垣), which consists of twenty Chinese asterisms.⁵ Moving around the vessel in a clockwise direction, the next pair of trigrams to appear are *zhen* 震 (☳, thunder; east) and *xun* 巽 (☴, wind; southeast); below them is the lug with the raised design of a rooster symbolizing the sun. The rear face of the vessel bears the trigrams *kan* 坎 (☵, water; north) and *li* 離 (☲, fire; south); below them is a cartouche containing another celestial region, the Heavenly Market Enclosure (*Tianshi yuan* 天市垣), which comprises nineteen Chinese asterisms.⁶ On the remaining side of the vessel are the *dui* 兌 (☱, lake; west) and *gen* 艮 (☶, mountain; northeast) trigrams and a lug with the raised relief image of a hare, symbolizing the moon.



Side view of vessel showing hare on lug handle



Side view of vessel showing rooster on lug handle

The pairs of trigrams on each face of the vessel are developed from the so-called Early Heaven or Pre-Heaven (*xian tian* 先天) arrangement attributed to Fuxi 伏羲, the first of the mythical Three Sovereigns of ancient China. The pairs here are opposite or complementary trigrams based on the earlier arrangement, which as a whole represents innate energies that are genetic and hereditary in nature, and thus represent the life potentiality or the possibility of life manifestation.

During the middle of the Ming dynasty, trigrams frequently appeared on works of art in various mediums. The Jiajing emperor (1507–1567; r. 1522–1566) favored Daoism over the mainstream Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism that had prevailed in the earlier portion of the dynasty. The concomitant rise of Daoist implements and motifs during the Jiajing period continued well into the late Ming. Unlike many other kinds of Daoist implements, the *mi dou* vessel in bronze rarely appears on the art and antiquities market.⁷ This may be because such ritual vessels are still being used in popular and religious Daoist practices throughout China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.⁸ In Taiwan, for instance, the beginning of the Lunar New Year is marked with a ritual known as *bai dou* 拜斗 (“worshipping the bushel”).⁹ In addition, the birthday of the Dipper Mother may be celebrated either on the twentieth day of the sixth lunar month or the ninth day of the ninth lunar month. On such occasions, a ritual vessel like the Kresko piece takes on great importance.

Technical Notes

The four-sided body of the vase was integrally cast, and the handles cast and attached with solder, as was the base. The exterior is not especially finely finished and minor casting flaws were not repaired. Tool marks from cold-working around the trigrams at the top of the vessel suggest that these were carved. Cold-working is also found on the six-character reign mark.

Provenance

Estate of Janella Evans, Eugene, Oregon, until 1998; Butterfield & Butterfield, San Francisco, 1998; Sydney L. Moss Ltd., London, 1998; Robert E. Kresko, St. Louis, 1998–2005.

Published

Butterfield & Butterfield, San Francisco, *Fine Asian Works of Art*, Sale 6764O, May 26–27, 1998, p. 7, lot no. 5535.

Exhibited

“In the Shadow of Dragons: The Robert Kresko Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes,” The Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas, Texas, March 7–September 9, 2001.

¹ The term *tianyi* 天一 (“Heaven’s One”) in the six-character mark refers to a specific combination of one of the Five Elements (water, fire, wood, metal, and earth) with a number from one to ten, found in the ancient *He tu* 河圖 (River Diagram, also known as the Yellow River Chart) as explained in commentaries to the Daoist *Yi jing* 《易經》 (Classic of Changes). In this system, Heaven’s *one* and Earth’s *six* combine to form water; Earth’s *two* and Heaven’s *seven* combine to form fire; Heaven’s *three* and Earth’s *eight* combine to form wood; Earth’s *four* and Heaven’s *nine* combine to form metal; and Heaven’s *five* and Earth’s *ten* combine to form earth. See Richard John Lynn, trans., *The Classic of Changes: A New Translation of the I Ching as Interpreted by Wang Bi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 72, n. 35, and p. 74, n. 52. The most famous usage of the term *tianyi* is in the name of the oldest surviving private library building in China, the Tianyi ge 天一閣 (Pavilion of Heaven and One) established by the Ming official and bibliophile Fan Qin 范欽 (1506–1585) in 1561 in Ningbo, Zhejiang province.

² Kristofer M. Schipper, *The Taoist Body*, translated from the French by Karen C. Duval (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), p. 72.

³ The Dipper Mother, a star deity, is a Daoist derivation of the Buddhist Tantric deva Marici (whose name means “Ray of Light”); worshippers invoke her through visualizations in order to unite themselves with the cosmic light that she embodies. The most relevant scripture, found in *juan* 621 of the Daoist canon (*Dao zang* 《道藏》)—*Taishang xuanling Doumu dasheng yuanjun benming yansheng xin jing* 《太上玄靈斗母大聖元君本命延生心經》 (Heart Scripture on Original Life-Destiny and Extending Life of the Great Sagely Goddess Dipper Mother of the Great High Mysterious Numinosity)—has been translated by Livia Kohn in her “Doumu: The Mother of the Dipper,” *Ming Qing Yanjiu*, vol. 9 (2000), pp. 149–95. The Dipper Mother was first worshipped in earnest in the early fifteenth century during the Ming dynasty; see Margaret Visser, *Much Depends on Dinner: The Extraordinary History and Mythology, Allure and Obsessions, Perils and Taboos, of an Ordinary Meal* (New York: Grove Press, 1987), p. 170; Stephen L. Little with Shawn Eichman, *Taoism and the Arts of China* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, in association with Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 282–83, cat. no. 98; and Catherine Despeux and Livia Kohn, *Women in Daoism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Three Pines Press, 2003), pp. 66–69.

⁴ For the Eight Trigrams, see Schuyler V. R. Cammann, “The Eight Trigrams: Variants and Their Uses,” *History of Religions*, vol. 29, no. 4 (May 1990), pp. 301–17; and Little with Eichman, *Taoism and the Arts of China*, pp. 138–39, cat. no. 14.

⁵ The Supreme Palace Enclosure’s twenty asterisms, which roughly correspond to parts of the constellations Virgo, Leo, Coma Berenices, Ursa Major, Canes Venatici, and Leo Minor, are as follows: Left Wall (Zuoyuan 左垣), five stars (roughly corresponding to parts of the modern-day constellations Virgo and Coma Berenices); Right Wall (Youyuan 右垣), five stars (Leo, Virgo); Usher to the Court (Yezhe 謁者), one star (Virgo); Three Excellencies (Sangong 三公), three stars (Virgo); Nine Senior Officers (Jiuqing 九卿), three stars (Virgo); Five Feudal Kings (Wuzhuhou 五諸侯), five stars (Coma Berenices); Inner Screen (Neiping 內屏), four stars (Virgo); Seats of the Five Emperors (Wudizuo 五帝座), five stars (Leo); Officer of Honour (Xingchen 幸臣), one star (Coma Berenices); Crown Prince (Taizi 太子), one star (Leo); Retinue (Congguan 從官), one star (Leo); Captain of the Bodyguards (Langjiang 郎將), one star (Coma Berenices); Emperor’s Bodyguard (Huben 虎賁), one star (Leo); Imperial Guards (Changchen 常陳), seven stars (Canes Venatici, Ursa

Major); Official of the Imperial Guard (Langwei 郎位), fifteen stars (Coma Berenices); Cosmological Temple (Mingtang 明堂), three stars (Leo); Astronomical Observatory (Lingtai 靈台), three stars (Leo); Junior Officers (Shaowei 少微), four stars (Leo, Leo Minor); Long Wall (Changyuan 長垣), four stars (Leo); and Three Steps (Santai 三台), six stars (Ursa Major). For a more detailed discussion of the Supreme Palace Enclosure and its asterisms, see Chen Jixiong [Chan Ki-hung], *Zhongguo gu xing tu (Chinese Ancient Star Map)* [Hong Kong: Kangle ji wenhua shi wu shu (Leisure and Cultural Services Department), 2002], pp. 20–24; see also Yip Chee-kuen [Ye Ciquan], *Xing, yi, wu, huan: Zhongguo gudai tianwen wenwu jinghua (Moving Stars, Changing Scenes: Gems of the Ancient Chinese Astronomy Relics)*, produced by Xianggang kexue guan (Hong Kong Science Museum), English ed. [Hong Kong: Kangle ji wenhua shi wu shu (Leisure and Cultural Services Department), 2006], p. 16 (middle diagram) and p. 165 (upper left column).

⁶ The Heavenly Market Enclosure's nineteen asterisms, roughly corresponding to parts of the constellations Hercules, Serpens, Ophiuchus, Corona Borealis, Aquila, and Bootes, are as follows: Left Wall (Zuoyuan 左垣), eleven stars (roughly corresponding to parts of the modern-day constellations Hercules, Serpens, Ophiuchus, Aquila); Right Wall (Youyuan 右垣), eleven stars (Serpens, Ophiuchus, Hercules); Municipal Office (Shilou 市樓), six stars (Serpens, Ophiuchus); Commodity Market (Chesi 車肆), two stars (Ophiuchus); Official for the Royal Clan (Zongzheng 宗正), two stars (Ophiuchus); Official of Religious Ceremonies (Zongren 宗人), four stars (Ophiuchus); Patriarchal Clan (Zong 宗), two stars (Hercules); Textile Ruler (Bodu 帛度), two stars (Hercules); Butcher's Shops (Tusi 屠肆), two stars (Hercules); Astrologer (Hou 候), one star (Ophiuchus); Emperor's Seat (Dizuo 帝座), one star (Hercules); Eunuch Official (Huanzhe 宦者), four stars (Hercules, Ophiuchus); Jewel Market (Liesi 列肆), two stars (Ophiuchus, Serpens); Dipper for Liquids (Dou 斗), five stars (Hercules); Dipper for Solids (Hu 斛), four stars (Hercules, Ophiuchus); Coiled Thong (Guansuo 貫索), nine stars (Corona Borealis); Seven Excellencies (Qigong 七公), seven stars (Hercules, Bootes); Celestial Discipline (Tianji 天紀), nine stars (Hercules, Corona Borealis); and Woman's Bed (Nüchuang 女床), three stars (Hercules). For a more detailed discussion of the Heavenly Market Enclosure and its asterisms, see Chen Jixiong, *Zhongguo gu xing tu (Chinese Ancient Star Map)*, pp. 26–30; see also Yip Chee-kuen, *Xing, yi, wu, huan (Moving Stars, Changing Scenes)*, p. 16 (right diagram) and p. 165 (lower left column).

⁷ For a related example of a Qing bronze covered censer depicting the twenty-eight constellations, see Beijing Hanhai Art Auction Co., *Zhongguo gudong zhenwan: Beijing Hanhai yishu pin paimai gongsi '98 qiuji paimai hui* (Chinese Curios: Beijing Hanhai '98 Autumn Auctions), August 3, 1998 (Beijing: Beijing Hanhai yishu pin paimai gongsi [Beijing Hanhai Art Auction Co., Ltd.], 1998), lot no. 1415; and Liao Wenwei, Yang Hua, and Ma Li, eds., *Gudong paimai jicheng: Luju, jiaju* (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2002), p. 38, no. 1415.

⁸ For an illustration of a rice bushel used in Daoist ceremonies in contemporary Taiwan, see David Ownby, "The Heaven and Earth Society as Popular Religion," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 54, no. 4 (November 1995), p. 1031, fig. 1; the illustration is redrawn from Michael R. Saso, *Taoism and the Rite of Cosmic Renewal* (Pullman, Wash.: Washington State University Press, 1972), p. 101.

⁹ Christian Jochim, "Flowers, Fruit, and Incense Only: Elite versus Popular in Taiwan's Religion of the Yellow Emperor," *Modern China*, vol. 16, no. 1 (January 1990), p. 13.

No. 16

侈口螭龍耳紋四足水仙盆式香爐

Censer in the Form of a Narcissus Basin with Chi-Dragon Handles

Ming dynasty (1368–1644) or Qing dynasty (1644–1911), 17th century

Cast bronze with cast and cold-worked decoration, with a pigmented coating over induced surface color;
height 11 cm, width 27 cm, depth 16.3 cm

Collection of Robert E. Kresko

This censer takes the form of a vessel type known as a “narcissus basin” (*shuixian pen* 水仙盆). It is elliptical in shape and flat-based, with concave spreading sides and flat mouth rim. The handles, one at each end, take the form of *chi*-dragons (*chi long* 螭龍), which are immature and scaleless dragons with bifurcated tails. They appear to be tightly grasping the rim with their forelimbs while their hind legs are attached to the side of the bowl. The curled ends of the split tails extend in either direction from their bodies, adding elegant flourishes that are visible from any angle. The dragons’ widely arched backs not only lend them a sense of energy but facilitate easy handling of the vessel. Four low cabriole feet are attached to a thickened band that encircles the base. The shaped feet are decorated with stylized cloud scrolls in the form of *ruyi*-scepter heads. On the base is a six-character apocryphal reign mark reading *Da Ming Xuande nian zhi* 大明宣德年製 (“Made in the Xuande era of the Great Ming”) set within a slightly recessed rectangular cartouche.

The elliptical form of the narcissus basin first appeared in Chinese ceramics during the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127). Perhaps the most refined and best-known examples are four Ru 汝 ware narcissus basins from the late eleventh or early twelfth century in the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Elegant and restrained in form, they are covered in an exquisite pale grayish-blue glaze and have no decoration apart from the four low, cloud-headed feet below a thickened band, except for one of the basins whose feet were ground down at some point.¹ The simplicity of this vessel type was picked up during the early Ming dynasty, when the Jingdezhen kilns in Jiangxi produced monochrome-glazed but otherwise completely undecorated vessels of this type, as exemplified by a cobalt blue-glazed narcissus basin without raised feet from the Xuande period (1426–1435).²

Sculpturally articulated handles in the form of dragonlike animals may be found on archaic bronzes from the late Western Zhou dynasty (c.1050–771 B.C.). The National Palace Museum, Taipei, has a spouted water vessel (*yi* 匱) with an animal handle and four legs in the form of human figures. Perched on one end of the vessel as if drinking from it, the unclassified animal’s formal elements—feline head, arched and attenuated body, curled tail, and distinctive posture—make it a precursor to the *chi*-dragons seen on the handles of later vessels.³





Side view of the censer

Creatures that are recognizable as *chi*-dragons are seen on ceramics of the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279). A few surviving examples of Southern Song cups featuring *chi*-dragon handles originate from kilns in Jiangxi province. One is a straight-sided cup with applied handles and a splayed foot ring, now in the Barlow Collection.⁴ Another cup, now in the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, is very similar to the Barlow piece except that the vessel has gently curving sides and the *chi*-dragons are curved differently in profile, allowing the cup to be held at a level nearer to the rim.⁵

The popularity of *chi*-dragon handles on cups and other vessels was apparently widespread and influential even in areas remote from the major metropolitan centers of China. A case in point is the well-known oval, one-handled jade cup in the British Museum, which bears an inscription on the exterior associating it with the Timurid ruler Ulugh Beg (1394–1449), who was the grandson of the Mongol conqueror Timur (Tamerlane; 1336–1405) and who was based in what is present-day Samarkand, Uzbekistan. The shallow, olive green Khotanese nephrite cup has a *chi*-dragon clambering up one of the short ends, biting the rim and grasping it with both forepaws, while its bifurcated tail swings to the right. The vessel was most likely made in Central Asia in the early fifteenth century based on Chinese models (Fig. 5).⁶

The *chi*-dragon handles may well have been inspired by those found on one- or two-handled jade cups that became popular starting in the mid-Ming period.⁷ These carved jade cups with distinctive and highly sculptural *chi*-dragon handles remained in production during the late Ming and early Qing periods without great changes in style. Perhaps the most important of all surviving late Ming two-handled vessels of this type is an exquisitely veined and translucent white jade cup with a low foot in the Musée national des Arts asiatiques–Guimet, Paris. Sometime between 1653 and 1661, it entered the collection of the wealthy and powerful prime minister of France, Cardinal Mazarin (1602–1661), after whose death it passed to the royal collection of Louis XIV (1638–1715).⁸ The dragons appear to bite the rim of the cup as they hold on to it, while each body arches outward, its bifurcated tail curving to the right onto the sides of the cup, producing a design of rotational symmetry and great fluidity (Fig. 6). An early Qing variation on this design is found on a small jade cup in the National Palace Museum, Taipei; it is decorated with a large and a small *chi*-dragon, one on each side of the vessel.⁹

The Kresko vessel, therefore, represents a bronze type that combines forms previously found in ceramics and jade. This vessel type became established during the middle and late Ming period and continued through the Qing dynasty. They were made in considerable quantity, judging from the many surviving examples.¹⁰ The elegance of form and restrained decoration in the present piece suggests that it was made during the seventeenth century in the late Ming or early Qing. The production of such bronze vessels continued well into the Qianlong period, during which porcelain versions, probably made for use as brush washers, appeared in considerable quantities.¹¹



Fig. 5: Cup of Ulugh Beg, Central Asia, Timurid dynasty, c.1420–49; Khotanese nephrite; diameter 19.4 cm; The Trustees of the British Museum, London.



Fig. 6: Cup with *chi*-dragon handles (known as the “Mazarin” jade); Ming dynasty (1368–1644); nephrite; width 10.5 cm; Musée national des Arts asiatiques–Guimet, Paris. Photo credit: Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY.



View of censer's base showing apocryphal reign mark

Technical Notes

The vessel appears to have been integrally cast with the handles and feet. It is well finished on the exterior, with well-executed repairs; however, the undersides of the dragons are roughly finished, with mold material left in some crevices. Very fine details, such as the hairs along the dragons' spines, were added with cold-working. Tool marks indicate the reign mark was cold-worked; the impression of the cartouche can be seen on the bowl's interior. However, rubbings of the reign mark and that of a similar narcissus bowl from another private collection in St. Louis were compared on a light table and found to be identical, suggesting that they were cast from a reusable impression and then finished with cold-working.¹²

¹ See Guoli gugong bowu yuan (National Palace Museum), *Da guan: Bei Song Ru yao tezhan (Grand View: Special Exhibition of Ju Ware from the Northern Sung Dynasty)* [Taipei: Guoli gugong bowu yuan (National Palace Museum), 2006], pp. 52–53, cat. no. 7 (*Gu ci* 故瓷 017851); pp. 54–55, cat. no. 8 (*Gu ci* 故瓷 013977); pp. 56–61, cat. no. 9 (*Gu ci* 故瓷 014019); and pp. 182–83, cat. no. 41 (*Gu ci* 故瓷 017699). The first of these examples (*Gu ci* 故瓷 017851), which happens to be the only extant piece of Ru ware without any crackling in the glaze, also appears in Yu Peichin, “The Imprint of Collecting: The

Circulation of Northern Song Ru Ware in the 18th Century Qing Palace,” *Orientations*, vol. 38, no. 1 (January–February 2007), p. 54, fig. 11.

² Narcissus basin with a six-character reign mark on base in underglaze blue, reading *Da Ming Xuande nian zhi* 大明宣德年製, early fifteenth century, Jingdezhen ware, porcelain with blue glaze (*Gu ci* 故瓷 013530), published in Guoli gugong bowu yuan, *Da guan*, p. 61, fig. 4.

³ Western Zhou dynasty, mid-ninth century–771 B.C., (*Gu tong* 故銅 02392), in Wen C. Fong and James C. Y. Watt, *Possessing the Past: Treasures from the National Palace Museum, Taipei* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1996), p. 80, pl. 43; and Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, *Trésors du Musée national du Palais, Taipei: Mémoire d'Empire* (Paris: Association Française d'Action Artistique; Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1998), p. 114, cat. no. 64.

⁴ Dragon cup, thirteenth century, porcelain with *qingbai* glaze except around the rim, Barlow Collection, University of Sussex, Sussex, England (C240), in Stacey Pierson, ed., *Qingbai Ware: Chinese Porcelain of the Song and Yuan Dynasties* (London: Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2002), pp.

94–95, cat. no. 41. For a slightly smaller, but otherwise almost identical, example from the Carl Kempe Collection, see Bo Gyllensvärd, *Chinese Gold, Silver, and Porcelain: The Kempe Collection* (New York: The Asia Society, Inc., 1971), p. 115, cat. no. 124 (illustration), and p. 132, cat. no. 124 (entry).

5 Cup with dragon handles, thirteenth to fourteenth century, porcelain with *qingbai* glaze except around the rim, Gift of Sparks, London (B76 P1), in He Li, *Chinese Ceramics: A New Comprehensive Survey from the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1996), p. 161, no. 288 (illustration), and p. 194, no. 288 (descriptive text), and in Pierson, ed., *Qingbai Ware*, pp. 94–95, cat. no. 42.

6 Cup of Ulugh Beg [OA 1959.11–20.1 (36)], in Ralph Pinder-Wilson and William Watson, “An Inscribed Jade Cup from Samarqand,” *The British Museum Quarterly*, vol. 23, no. 1 (September 1960), pp. 19–21; and Michèle Pirazzoli-t’Serstevens, “Un jade chinois des collections de Louis XIV au Musée Guimet,” *Arts asiatiques*, t. 25 (1972), p. 204, pls. 4–6. The British Museum also possesses another nephrite cup with a single *chi*-dragon handle, Iran or Timurid dynasty, c.1400–1450 (OA 1961.7–13.1).

7 See, for instance, a sixteenth-century one-handled libation cup in the National Palace Museum, Taipei (*Gu yu* 故玉 01333), nephrite, in Guoli gugong bowu yuan (National Palace Museum), *Gu se: Shiliu zhi shiba shiji yishu de fanggu feng (Through the Prism of the Past: Antiquarian Trends in Chinese Art of the 16th to 18th Century)* [Taipei: Guoli gugong bowu yuan (National Palace Museum), 2003], p. 79, cat. no. I-55 (illustration), and p. 231, cat. no. I-55 (cat. entry); and a sixteenth-century two-handled cup in the Victoria and Albert Museum (C1812–1910), nephrite, in Ming S. Wilson, *Chinese Jades* (London: V&A Publications, 2004), p. 43, pl. 41.

8 Cup with *chi*-dragon handles, also known as the “Mazarin” jade, early seventeenth century, nephrite, Musée national des Arts asiatiques-Guimet, Paris, Anc. Coll. Royale (MR 204-585), in Pirazzoli-t’Serstevens, “Un jade chinois des collections de Louis XIV au Musée Guimet,” p. 203, pls. 1–2; Xianggang yishu guan (Hong Kong Museum of Art), *Cong Beijing dao Fan’ersai: Zhong Fa meishu jiaoliu (From Beijing to Versailles: Artistic Relations between China and France)* [Hong Kong: Xianggang shizheng ju (Urban Council of Hong Kong), 1997], pp. 198–99, cat. no. 72; and Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, *Trésors du Musée national du Palais, Taipei*, p. 29, ill. 1.

9 Nephrite (*Gu yu* 故玉 01333), in Guoli gugong bowu yuan, *Gu se*, p. 78, cat. no. I-53 (illustration), and p. 231, cat. no. I-53 (cat. entry). The footless cup comes with a fitted wooden stand and a carved wooden box and cover; the box is engraved with the text of the famous *Record of the Jade Cup* (*Yu bei ji* 《玉盃記》) composed around 1753 by the Qianlong emperor, who

prized the object even though he had once erroneously believed it to be an ancient work of the Han dynasty.

¹⁰ For similar examples, see a bronze censer with *chi*-dragon handles with an apocryphal six-character mark (*Da Ming Xuande nian zhi* 大明宣德年製) on base, fifteenth to sixteenth century, in Chen Qinghong, *Da Ming Xuande lu zonglun* (Yongkang, Tainan, Taiwan: Juguang chuban she, 1996), p. 179, color pl. 202; two bronze vessels with Yang Bingzhen, Taipei, in Guoli lishi bowu guan (National Museum of History), *Jin yu qing yan: Yang Bingzhen xiansheng zhencang Ming Qing tong lu (Golden Jade and Azure Mist: Bronze Censers of the Ming and Qing in the Collection of Mr. Yang Bingzhen)* [Taipei: Guoli lishi bowu guan (National Museum of History), 1996], p. 293, cat. no. 259 (with a six-character apocryphal Xuande mark), and cat. no. 260 (with a two-character apocryphal Xuande mark). Two other similar bronzes, both with apocryphal six-character Xuande marks, are in the collection of Steven Hung (Hong Sanxiong) and Lindy Chern (Chen Lingyu), Taipei; in Guoli lishi bowu guan (National Museum of History), *Shuangqing cang lu (Chinese Incense Burners: Collection of Steven Hung & Lindy Chern)* [Taipei: Guoli lishi bowu guan (National Museum of History), 2000], p. 105, cat. no. 75 and p. 108, cat. no. 78. For other examples that have appeared on the art market, see Christie’s London, *Fine and Early Chinese Ceramics, Jades and Works of Art*, Sale 3358, April 21, 1986, p. 107, lot no. 231; and Christie’s New York, *Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art*, Sale 7542, December 3, 1992, p. 69, lot no. 143 (one of three bronze vessels).

¹¹ See, for instance, a small brush washer with *chi*-dragon handles, with a six-character reign mark (*Da Qing Qianlong nian zhi* 大清乾隆年製) on the base and of the period, Jingdezhen ware, porcelain with celadon glaze, Nanjing Museum, in Xu Huping, *The Treasures of the Nanjing Museum* (Hong Kong: London Editions [Hong Kong] Ltd.; Nanjing: The Nanjing Museum, 2001), p. 87, cat. no. 69.

¹² The comparative St. Louis piece has a height of 11.1 cm and a width of 26.7 cm; it is published in Sydney L. Moss Ltd., *The Second Bronze Age: Later Chinese Metalwork*, catalogue by Paul Moss and Gerard Hawthorn (London: Sydney L. Moss Ltd., 1991), cat. no. 43.



No. 17

蟠龍紋朝冠耳三足鼎式銅香爐連玉頂木蓋及木座

Archaistic Tripod Censer with Cover and Stand

Ming dynasty (1368–1644) or Qing dynasty (1644–1911), 17th–early 18th century

Cast bronze with ferrous addition; wood and nephrite;

height 66.7 cm, width 65.2 cm

Saint Louis Art Museum, Partial and promised gift of Robert E. Kresko

6:2005a-c

The body of this massive tripod vessel may be divided into three ornamented sections: bowl, waistband, and shoulder. The squat, round bowl is separated by a thickened bowstring from a narrow vertical waistband. At the shoulder, the convex contour of the bowl reverses and becomes briefly concave just below the thick, everted rim with a vertical lip. Each of the three cabriole legs issues from the mouths of animal heads, whose nose ridges appear as vertical flanges and whose eyes, brows, and ears are all prominently shaped. Emerging from the narrow waistband is a pair of inverted U-shaped loop handles of rectangular section, which project upward and outward from the sides. The handles appear S-shaped in profile. The underside of the censer's body has a separately attached bottom piece with a four-character apocryphal reign mark reading *Xuande nian zhi* 宣德年製 ("Made in the Xuande era").

The vessel is accompanied by a carved and partially openwork wood cover. A pale-colored jade knob in the form of a recumbent ram sits on a small circular platform with incised decoration of stylized clouds, below which are five concentric registers of decoration; a narrow band of clouds shaped like *ruyi* 如意 scepter heads; a singular band of stylized petals; a wide register with designs of stylized strapwork clouds, scrolls, and other patterns; a band of seven bowstrings; and finally a single key-fret band at the rim. The vessel sits on an elaborately carved wood stand, which is triangular in overall form but has strongly articulated edges based on *ruyi*-scepter heads. A slightly domed circular panel at the center has openwork decoration of a medallion containing a *shou* 壽 ("longevity") character surrounded by stylized strapwork scrolls. The wide apron between the three bracketed feet of the stand is embellished with carved scrolled designs. Both the cover and stand may be dated to the Qianlong period (1736–1795) of the Qing dynasty on the basis of their style and decoration, though they were probably not made by the same workshop.

Below the vertical lip with its squared spirals, the principal decoration on the tripod's body comprises three horizontal registers of contiguous interlacery executed in a flat two-layer relief, one register each on the shoulder, waistband, and upper portion of the bowl. The outlines of the interlaced dragon patterns are filled with composite rounded and angled C-spirals that appear to occupy trapezoidal spatial units. Directly under the lowest



View of the censer from above, showing carved wood cover

and widest horizontal register hangs a frieze of triangular, bladelike lappets, each bordered by a band of squared spirals and containing within the remaining space a design resembling a *ruyi*-scepter head over a shieldlike form.

The overall form of the Kresko vessel is closely related to a number of ritual tripod vessels (*ding* 鼎) from the late seventh to early sixth century B.C. discovered in 1923 at Lijialou 李家樓, Xinzheng 新鄭 county, Henan province, the largest of which has a height of approximately 60 cm. However, the flat interlaced dragon pattern, which somehow gives the impression of layers without plastic relief, is more closely related to those found on a large group of bronzes uncovered in 1923 by a rainstorm in Liyu 李峪 village, at the northern foot of Mount Heng (Hengshan 恒山) in Hunyuan 渾源 county, Shanxi province.¹ The Liyu bronzes are believed to have been made c. 500 B.C. at an enormous foundry belonging to the state of Jin 晉 (located in the present-day city of Houma 侯馬 in southern Shanxi province) and may be dated to the Spring and Autumn period (771–c. 475 B.C.).² Dispersed soon after their discovery, many of the bronzes from Liyu were brought to the West, where they were quickly recognized as being exceptional in terms of both design and craftsmanship, despite the fact that none bear inscriptions (Fig. 7).

The four-character apocryphal reign mark on the underside of the body may or may not have been original to the tripod vessel, since it is found on a piece that was soldered to the



View of the censer's wood stand

rest of the object as a repair or replacement. The dating of this bronze is largely based on thermoluminescence (TL) analysis.³ The artificial corrosion and patination found on the vessel does corroborate with descriptions of techniques that were already in use by the later part of the Ming. In a short, single-juan work entitled *Xuan lu bo lun* 《宣爐博論》 (Learned Discussions on Xuande Censers), Xiang Yuanbian 項元汴 (1525–1590), the great Ming collector-dealer from Xiushui 秀水 (now Jiaxing 嘉興) in Zhejiang province, describes the methods used to produce simulated patination and corrosion:

With the exception of vessels maintaining the original colour of the metal, the Hsüan period vessels (i.e., of the Hsüan-te 宣德 period) contained a class with an imitation of ancient patina. They were not like the forged products of Honan, Chin-ling, Ku-su and such places made by baking and burying. An old bronze founder told me that the imitation of the archaic green colours on the Hsüan bronzes was achieved by obtaining from the royal stores broken and incomplete ancient vessels. They selected those with the blue-green and jade-green colourings and pounded them into a powder and dissolving this in quicksilver, threw it into the molten bronze and melted it together. When the vessel was completed, they next applied the colours of green patina and red cinnabar using a mixture of quicksilver and finest sand, blended with the colours, dabbing this on to the vessel body and allowing it to soak in. The vessel was then roasted and cooled alternate-

ly over a fierce fire up to five times and thus the green patina colour entered deeply into the interior of the metal. Then the vessel was boiled thoroughly in molten white wax, brushed with a coir palm-leaf brush, rubbed with cotton cloth, then within and without, the green and red colourings stood out, and even when scraped with a knife they did not break away.”⁴

It is not possible to know if the original owner of this vessel and later collectors in China were aware of its actual period of manufacture, but the sheer size and visual power would surely have awed those who set eyes on it. In retrospect, this imposing bronze tripod may be considered an excellent example of late Ming or early Qing antiquarian taste; it was the product of skilled artisans who met the demand of collectors and connoisseurs for works of such grand scale.



Fig. 7: Ritual food vessel (*ding*) with cover; Eastern Zhou dynasty (c.771–221 B.C.), Spring and Autumn period (c.771–475 B.C.) or Warring States period (c.475–221 B.C.), c.550–400 B.C.; cast bronze; height 38.1 cm, width 79.4 cm, depth 45.7 cm; Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, The Avery Brundage Collection (B60 B29+). © Asian Art Museum of San Francisco.

Technical Notes

The design on the exterior of the censer appears to be integrally cast with minimal cold-working. Vertical mold lines can be discerned at regular intervals in recesses between the design elements. The mold lines do not extend into undecorated areas.

The red and green “corrosion” products on the surface appear to be artificial and intentionally applied.

The legs appear to have been cast in place, but X-rays would be necessary to confirm this. It appears that both handles were cast and attached separately. One of the handles has subsequently been reattached using solder and mechanical fasteners.

The censer was damaged at some point in its history. Cracks run throughout the censer; it is not known whether these are the result of casting or later damage. The bottom is a separate piece with a scalloped edge; while it is also not known whether it is the original bottom that was modified and reattached or a new piece supplied at the time the censer was damaged, the latter seems more likely. The bottom has been soldered into place and shaped to accommodate the legs. The corrosion/accretions on the bottom are distinct from the rest of the piece. The reign mark on the bottom of the censer appears to be cast, although it is difficult to tell since it is covered with coating residue.

A liner of ferrous sheet metal has been soldered together from sections and attached to the interior of the censer. The liner accommodates displacement of the metal in the body where one of the legs was bent inward.

Provenance

Nelson A. Rockefeller, Pocantico Hills, N.Y., until 1979; Estate of Nelson A. Rockefeller, administered by Mrs. Nelson A. Rockefeller (Margaretta Large Fitler Murphy Rockefeller), 1979–2000; J. J. Lally & Co., New York, 2000; Collection of Robert E. Kresko, St. Louis, 2000–2005.

Exhibited

“In the Shadow of Dragons: The Robert Kresko Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes,” The Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas, Texas, March 7–September 9, 2001.

¹ For a study on the bronze ritual vessels from Liyu village, see Li Xiating, “Hunyuan yiqi yanjiu,” *Wenwu* (*Cultural Relics*), no. 437 (1992, no. 10), pp. 61–75.

² See Shanxi sheng kaogu yanjiu suo (Institute of Archaeology of Shanxi Province), Taiyuan, *Houma taofan yishu* (*Art of the Houma Foundry*) [Princeton: Princeton University Press (Pulinsidun daxue chubanshe), 1996].

³ TL testing was conducted by Oxford Authentication Ltd. of Wantage, Oxfordshire, England. A report dated February 17, 1999, for Sample No. C199d60, taken from casting core from the handles on January 7, 1999, indicates that the object was made between 250 and 400 years earlier. The date of production is therefore sometime between 1599 and 1749 (seventeenth to early eighteenth century), toward the end of the Ming or during the first century of Qing rule.

⁴ The *Xuan lu bo lun* survives in a manuscript of 1623 and was included in the Qing imperial collectanea *Siku quanshu* 《四庫全書》 (Complete Library of the Four Treasuries) as an appendix to the *Xuande dingyi pu* 《宣爐鼎彝譜》 (Catalogue of Ritual Vessels of the Xuande Era) in 8 *juan* compiled by Lü Zhen (1365–1426) et al. The passage excerpted here is translated by Noel Barnard, *Bronze Casting and Bronze Alloys in Ancient China*, Monumenta Serica Monograph Series, no. 14 (Canberra, Australia: The Australian National University; N.p. [Nagoya, Japan]: Monumenta Serica, 1961), pp. 209 and 212; also cited in David A. Scott, *Copper and Bronze in Art: Corrosion, Colorants, Conservation* (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute; Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2002), p. 347.

No. 18

帶龍鳳戲珠紋蓋海水瑞獸紋銅香爐

Covered Censer with Design of Dragons, Phoenixes, and Sea Creatures

Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Kangxi period (1662–1722), late 17th–early 18th century

Cast bronze with tinted coating; height 13.2 cm, width 14.7 cm, depth 9.5 cm

Collection of Robert E. Kresko

This covered censer belongs to a type that first appeared during the early Qing dynasty and gained widespread popularity. Elliptical in cross-section and having an everted lip, the body of the censer features a continuous frieze, in high relief, depicting mythical sea creatures (*haishou* 海獸) cavorting amidst turbulent waves.¹ On the two shorter sides are separately cast and attached lion heads in bold relief that serve as handles; each head is pierced and suspends a C-shaped loop ring, the lower and thicker portion of which is decorated with vignettes of cresting waves that match those on the body's frieze. The censer is raised on a multitiered pedestal, which is embellished by a band of lappets in the form of stylized lotus petals.² The base of the censer is recessed from the foot ring, and within a countersunk rectangle is a six-character apocryphal reign mark reading *Da Ming Xuande nian zhi* 大明宣德年製 (“Made in the Xuande era of the Great Ming”).

The dimensions of the cover's opening are identical to those of the censer's mouth so that the fit is nearly perfect. Above the splayed lower band of solid metal, the cover is decorated with openwork clouds, which are in turn surmounted by a pair of dragons chasing flaming pearls on the longer sides and a pair of phoenixes on the shorter sides. One of the phoenixes is male (*feng* 鳳) and the other female (*huang* 凰). From the center rises a reticulated knob shaped like a ball of clouds and topped by another dragon whose face peers outward over one of the longer sides.

Early examples of this kind of censer are mostly from the Kangxi period, and many from this period still exist in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing. Relatively small and portable, such censers were most likely made for domestic use rather than for temples. Some were so prized that they accompanied their owners to the grave. A bronze covered censer similar to the Kresko piece, but securely dated to 1675, was excavated from a Qing tomb in the western suburbs of Beijing.³ The design vocabulary found on the Kresko piece is more or less common to such covered censers, which show minor variations in the positions of the mythical animals, rendering of the waves, or the shape of the clouds. They may vary considerably in their size and surface coloration, but the overall proportions and design elements remain relatively consistent. Many censers of this conventional type were accompanied by matching stands, some with bracket feet, whose designs often repeat the apron of lotus-petal lappets found on the pedestal foot supporting the censer.⁴ It is not known whether the present censer had such a matching stand at some point.





View from bottom, showing apocryphal reign mark on the base of the censer

The decorative motif of mythical sea creatures became popular in the Ming, mostly likely because of a late fifteenth-century revival of interest in ancient texts, notably the *Shanhai jing* 《山海經》 (Classic of Mountains and Seas), a compendium replete with descriptions of geography, natural history, and mythology. The availability of various illustrated editions of the *Shanhai jing* from the late sixteenth century onward quickly led to the appearance of new motifs in the decorative arts; this is especially true of ceramics, an industry that had long relied on woodblock illustrations as rich sources of visual motifs.⁵ The seemingly endless inventory of strange beasts and figures from this classic work would also inspire bronze artisans, who quickly followed potters and adapted the images on vessels such as censers, which were always in demand.

A similar covered censer is in the Phoenix Art Museum. It is slightly larger and more crisply worked than the Kresko censer, but it appears to have lost the rings that would have been suspended from the lion-head handles. The apocryphal reign mark is not illustrated, but the object displays all the typical Kangxi-period characteristics previously outlined.⁶ Another covered censer of this type, in the collection of Wang Du 王度 (Wellington Wang), Taipei, has nearly identical dimensions and similar decoration to the Kresko piece but contains somewhat less detail.⁷ A comparison of these three covered censers demonstrates that different qualities of workshop production existed to accommodate the varying tastes and budgets of the clientele during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and probably later as well.⁸ It appears that such censers were produced into the early twentieth century, as seen in a fairly large late Qing or early Republican censer with cover and matching stand that appeared at auction in 1988.⁹

Technical Notes

The cover and censer were each integrally cast; the animal head handles were riveted to the censer and have C-shaped loops inserted into their mouths. Cold-working was minimal, although there are tool marks on the foot of the censer and on the reign mark on the underside.

Exhibited

"In the Shadow of Dragons: The Robert Kresko Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes," The Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas, Texas, March 7–September 9, 2001.

¹ These censers are often described as rectangular with rounded edges; this is incorrect as there are no straight lines at any point along the continuously curved mouth of the censer or the base of the cover.

² These stylized lotus lappets are clearly derived from the pedestals of Sino-Tibetan sculptures during the Ming and Qing dynasties.

³ See Su Tianjun, "Beijing xijiao Xiaoxitian Qing dai muzang fajue jianbao," *Wenwu (Cultural Relics)*, no. 147 (1963, no. 1), p. 57, fig. 18.

⁴ See, for example, Phillips London, *Chinese & Japanese Ceramics, Ivories, Inro & Works of Art*, Sale 30,189, December 18, 1996, p. 68, lot no. 185; Christie's New York, *Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art*, Sale 8608, March 20–21, 1997, p. 96, lot no. 305; and Sotheby's New York, *Fine Chinese Works of Art*, Sale 7338, September 15, 1999, pp. 56–57, lot no. 53. See also a covered censer in the collection of Yang Bingzhen, Taipei, in Guoli lishi bowu yuan (National Museum of History), *Jin yu qing yan: Yang Bingzhen xiansheng zhencang Ming Qing tong lu (Golden Jade and Azure Mist: Bronze Censers of the Ming and Qing in the Collection of Mr. Yang Bingzhen)* [Taipei: Guoli lishi bowu guan (National Museum of History), 1996], p. 261, cat. no. 209.

⁵ See, for instance, various real and imagined creatures (elephants, *qilin*, foxes, turtles, goats, celestial horses, dragons, and lions) on a stem cup in the Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, London, Ming dynasty, late sixteenth century, porcelain with underglaze blue decoration (PDF C601), in Stacey Pierson, *Designs as Signs: Decoration and Chinese Ceramics* (London: Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2001), p. 61, cat. no. 57.

⁶ Covered censer with two lion-head handles and with decoration of imaginary beasts against waves, the cover with dragons and phoenixes amidst clouds, Qing dynasty, Kangxi period, cast bronze with cast decoration, cold-worked details, and a cast thread-relief mark in standard-script (*kaishu* 楷書) characters reading *Da Ming Xuande nian zhi* 大明宣德年製 in a recessed rectangular cartouche on the base, Robert H. Clague Collection, in Robert D. Mowry, *China's Renaissance in Bronze: The Robert H. Clague Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes, 1100–1900* (Phoenix, Ariz.: Phoenix Art Museum, 1993), pp. 111–15, cat. no. 21.

⁷ Censer with "sea horse" decoration and a cover with a dragon playing with a pearl, six-character apocryphal reign mark reading *Da Ming Xuande nian zhi* 大明宣德年製, parcel-gilt bronze, height 12.2 cm, width 13 cm, depth 8 cm, published in Guoli lishi bowu guan (National Museum of History), *Xiangxun xianglu nuanlu (Censers, Incense Burners and Hand Warmers: Wellington Wang Collection)* [Taipei: Guoli lishi bowu guan (National Museum of History), 2000], p. 128, cat. no. 100.

⁸ For several other examples, see Sotheby's London, *Catalogue of Chinese Decorative Arts*, October 29, 1982, pp. 62–63, lot no. 149 (parcel-gilt bronze); Sotheby's London, *Fine Chinese Ceramics, Bronzes and Works of Art*, December 7, 1993, p. 55, lot no. 78 (late seventeenth century, bronze with traces of gilding, with wood cover and stand); and Christie's London, *Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art, Including Export Art*, Sale 7049, July 12, 2005, p. 34, lot no. 49 (eighteenth century, with apocryphal six-character Xuande mark).

⁹ Nineteenth to early twentieth century, in Butterfield & Butterfield, San Francisco, *Fine Oriental Works of Art*, Sale 39460, June 9, 1988, lot no. 250.

No. 19

雙螭龍耳異體壽字形三足銅香爐

Tripod Censer with Design of Shou Characters

Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Kangxi period (1662–1722) through Qianlong period (1736–1795),

late 17th century through first half of the 18th century

Cast bronze with cold-worked finishing of decoration and reign mark; induced patina with remnants of a reddish wax coating; height 22.2 cm, width 24.1 cm

Saint Louis Art Museum, Partial and promised gift of Robert E. Kresko

11:2005

This finely worked tripod censer has a globular body supported on three short nipple-form feet, each of which is elegantly embellished with a low-relief design of billowing clouds. The body is decorated at regular intervals with six low-relief characters, each reading *shou* 壽 (“longevity”). A pair of strongly modeled *chi*-dragons (*chi long* 螭龍), whose arched backs form the upright loop handles, appear to grasp the shoulders of the vessel with their clawed feet.¹ The form of the censer’s body is related to those found on tripod globular-bodied and round-bottomed earthenware jars that were especially popular in the late seventh through mid-eighth century during the Tang dynasty (618–907).² It was also inspired by a vessel type seen in early Qing porcelains from the Jingdezhen kilns.³ As for bronze, the vessel’s body shape is seen in an ovoid vase from the Phoenix Art Museum, albeit in somewhat more elongated form.⁴ While other similar examples have flat bases for practical reasons, the Kresko piece has a rounded bottom, made possible by the fact that it is elevated on three feet.

The use of variant character forms is entirely in keeping with decorations found in or on all manner of two- and three-dimensional objects (such as calligraphic works, textiles, porcelains, lacquerware, and bronzes) during the eighteenth century, which witnessed the completion of two extremely long reigns in Chinese imperial history—those of the Kangxi (r. 1662–1722) and Qianlong (r. 1736–1795) emperors (respectively sixty-one and sixty years). In the imperial context, the wish for longevity was manifested most fully in decorative schemes known as *bai shou* 百壽 (“one hundred years of longevity”) and *wan shou* 萬壽 (“ten thousand years of longevity”). The latter scheme may be observed in the decoration of imposing porcelain vases (*zun* 尊) commissioned by the imperial palace during the late Kangxi period. One such vase, dated to 1705 and now in the Palace Museum, Beijing, literally has ten thousand variant forms of the *shou* character written in underglaze blue and completely covering the exterior surfaces. It was made to commemorate the fiftieth birthday of the Kangxi emperor.⁵ During the Qianlong period, the *bai shou* and *wan shou* motifs were even more popular and often appeared in conjunction with other decorative symbols with embedded meanings.⁶





Side view of censer



View of a apocryphal reign mark on the base of censer's body

The choice of the six variant *shou* characters on the Kresko vessel is quite bold, for the characters are represented in eccentric and fanciful forms, and they may not be immediately recognizable as *shou* characters to the untrained eye. The implication behind this choice is that the intended recipient would have been so well educated and cultured that these unusual forms of a single character would not have been mistaken for others. The presence of auspicious cloud forms on each of the three feet augments the celebratory quality of the decoration.⁷ It is likely that the censer was made as a gift to be presented on the occasion of a significant birthday such as the fiftieth, sixtieth, or eightieth.

The relatively restrained decoration on this censer suggests that it could have been made during the late seventeenth century. However, the form and decoration certainly do not exhibit the overly exuberant character of so many late Qianlong works of art. Therefore, the censer was most likely made sometime during the Kangxi, Yongzheng, or early Qianlong periods. Notwithstanding the presence of an apocryphal six-character Xuande mark (*Da Ming Xuande nian zhi* 大明宣德年製) in a recessed square on the underside of the body, the overall craftsmanship of this censer is excellent and representative of the high level of technical achievement in early eighteenth-century Chinese bronze casting. Remarkably, the entire vessel is integrally cast, including the handles and legs, with some cold-working as finishing touches. No other early Qing censer with this unusual combination of shape, decoration, and technical prowess is known, making this one of the unique type-forms in the Kresko collection.

Technical Notes

This censer is nicely finished on the exterior, with neatly repaired casting flaws, although flaws at the backs of the dragons were not mended. Cold-working was used to finish the characters and reign mark as well as minor details on the handles. The interior is not finished; mold lines and caplets are visible.

Provenance

Sydney L. Moss Ltd., London, until 2001; Collection of Robert E. Kresko, St. Louis, 2001–2005.

Exhibited

“In the Shadow of Dragons: The Robert Kresko Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes,” The Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas, Texas, March 7–September 9, 2001.

¹ For another seventeenth-century bronze covered tripod censer with a similar combination of *chi*-dragon handles, nipple-shaped feet with low-relief decoration (in this case, of *ruyi*-scepter heads), and a six-character Xuande reign mark on the underside, see Sotheby's New York, *Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art*, Sale 6370, December 1–2, 1992, lot no. 204.

² See, for instance, a small covered tripod jar in the Museum of East Asian Art in Bath, England, earthenware with marbled light and dark brown design under pale green glaze, in The Museum of East Asian Art, *The Museum of East Asian Art: Inaugural Exhibition* (Bath, Eng.: The Museum of East Asian Art, 1993), vol. 1, *Chinese Ceramics*, p. 62, cat. no. 25 (text by Brian McElney).

³ A good example is a small vase with a Kangxi mark and period in the Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, porcelain with copper red underglaze and green, black, and iron red overglaze enamel decoration (PDF B702), in Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, *Illustrated Catalogue of Ming and Ming Style Polychrome Wares in the Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art: Section 5*, rev. ed. (London: Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2006), p. 77, no. B702 (cat. entry revised by Rebecca Feng). The vase, which is decorated with peony sprays and leaves in underglaze copper red and overglaze polychrome enamels, has a rolled lip, high and broad shoulders, and a globular body.

⁴ Kangxi period, cast bronze with applied gold splashes, with brown coating and a six-character reign mark on the base reading *Da Qing Kangxi nian zhi* 大清康熙年製 (“Made in the Kangxi era of the Great Qing”), Robert H. Clague Collection, in Robert D. Mowry, *China's Renaissance in Bronze: The Robert H. Clague Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes, 1100–1900* (Phoenix, Ariz.: Phoenix Art Museum, 1993), pp. 167–69, cat. no. 34.

⁵ Gu 故 156997, in Musée du Petit Palais, *La Cité interdite: Vie publique et privée des empereurs de Chine (1644–1911)* [Paris: Paris-Musées (Éditions des musées de la Ville de Paris); Paris: Association Française d'Action Artistique, 1996], p. 293, cat. no. 140; and Evelyn S. Rawski and Jessica Rawson, eds., China: *The Three Emperors, 1662–1795* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2005), p. 378, cat. no. 302 (illustration), and p. 469, cat. no. 302 (cat. entry by Regina Krahl). For an identical vase in the Nanjing Museum, see Xu Huping, *The Treasures of the Nanjing Museum* [Hong Kong: London Editions (Hong Kong) Ltd.; Nanjing: The Nanjing Museum, 2001], pp. 68–69, cat. no. 52. See also the numerous unusual *shou* characters over a diaper ground on three large Kangxi-period baluster-shaped, blue-and-white porcelain vases with apocryphal marks of the Chenghua period (1465–1487), formerly in the collection of Wilson P. Foss (1855–1930), in Sotheby's New York, *Fine Chinese Ceramics, Furniture and Works of Art*, Sale 6963, March 19, 1997, lot no. 242; and a large baluster-form vase with a hundred *shou* characters in hexagonal panels, Kangxi period (with an apocryphal six-character Chenghua mark), porcelain with underglaze cobalt blue decoration, in Sotheby's Hong Kong, *Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art*, Sale HK 0229, April 10, 2006, p. 137, lot no. 1691.

⁶ The Qianlong emperor, who was born in 1711 and died in 1799 at the age of eighty-nine, was the longest-lived emperor in Chinese history. His reign, which officially began on October 18, 1735, and ended on February 9, 1796, could have been even longer had he not abdicated in order not to exceed the regnal length of his grandfather, the Kangxi emperor.

⁷ The low-relief, billowing clouds on the feet are also seen in a covered bronze censer, probably of the late seventeenth century but with a six-character apocryphal Xuande mark, in Sotheby's New York, *Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art*, Sale 6370, December 1–2, 1992, lot no. 204.

No. 20

灑金銅螭龍耳平口三足香爐

Tripod Censer with Chi-Dragon Handles

Qing dynasty (1644–1911), late 17th–18th century

Cast bronze with applied gold splashes and a tinted coating, with cold-worked details;

height 22.9 cm, width 35.6 cm

Collection of Robert E. Kresko

The compressed, bombé-form body of this fairly large and heavy gold-sprinkled tripod censer is raised on three short but sturdy cabriole supports, each having a central ridge on the exterior face, hollow and open toward the interior. The short neck of the vessel flares slightly outward and upward from the shoulder toward a thick, flat rim. On either side of the rim, the censer is embellished with two very dramatic and powerfully modeled *chi*-dragons that serve as upright loop handles. Their bellies, which are visible as the inside surface of the handles, are modeled like twisted ropes that add considerable tension and elasticity to the sculptural forms. The spine of each *chi*-dragon is articulated with a ridge resembling a string of pearls that terminates just after the hind legs. The body of each then splits into an asymmetrical bifurcated tail with the curled ends resting on the shoulder of the censer. When viewed on the axis of the central foot, the dragon forming the right handle is oriented toward the front of the censer while its counterpart faces the opposite direction. With their heads pointing down, the coiled dragons appear to grasp the edges of the flat rim with their feet.

The exterior surfaces of the vessel, including the underside, are decorated with small, flat, and irregularly sprinkled flecks of gold. The subtle quality of the sprinkled gold decoration defers to the strong formal aspects of the censer's body as well as its *chi*-dragon handles. The presence of each *chi*-dragon handle, however, seems to be much more dominant when the censer is viewed from either side. Since the handles are not placed directly above any of the tripod feet, the side views have a much more asymmetrical appearance, with the body of the censer protruding much farther out in one direction.

As is the case with most examples of later Chinese bronzes, this censer has a “patina” that is artificial yet attractive. The induced patina is made to appear rich and warm through the application of a tinted wax coating. An apocryphal reign mark on the underside of the body is cast in relief within a rectangle, bearing the four-character legend *Xuande nian zhi* 宣德年製 (“Made in the Xuande era”) in a characteristically elongated seal-script.¹ Similar bronze censers of this type with *chi*-dragon handles are known to have been made in the late Ming dynasty.² However, the somewhat more mannered form, style, and decoration of the present piece are more in accord with those of early and mid-Qing examples.³





Side view of censer showing *chi*-dragon handles



Rear view of censer



View of apocryphal reign mark on
base of censer's body

Technical Notes

It appears that the feet of the censer were integrally cast with the body. The handles were cast separately and attached to the censer; cold-worked details were added to the *chi*-dragons. The reign mark on the underside also shows evidence of cold-working. The heavy censer has many casting flaws and repairs; the neck of one of the dragons is especially flawed. Core material remains in the feet and interior.

Provenance

Sotheby's New York, 1998.

Published

Sotheby's New York, *Fine Chinese Ceramics, Furniture and Works of Art*, Sale 7182, September 17, 1998, p. 76, lot no. 154; Ma Jinhong, *Ming Qing tongqi* (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chuban she, 2004), p. 67, no. 26.

Exhibited

"In the Shadow of Dragons: The Robert Kresko Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes," The Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas, Texas, March 7–September 9, 2001.

¹ The distinctive rectilinear style in this type of Xuande mark may appear in character groups of two (*Xuande* 宣德), three (*Xuande nian* 宣德年), or four (*Xuande nian zhi* 宣德年製) within a square or rectangle. For a selection of similar four-character, rectilinear-style Xuande marks on bronze censers, vases, and other vessels, see Guoli lishi bowu guan (National Museum of History), *Shuangqing cang lu* (*Chinese Incense Burners: Collection of Steven Hung & Lindy Chern*) [Taipei: Guoli lishi bowu guan (National Museum of History), 2000], p. 84, no. 53; p. 87, no. 56; p. 89, no. 58; p. 122, no. 94; and p. 157, no. 131. It should be noted that some or all of these marks may be apocryphal, but they nevertheless illustrate the continued use and popularity of the style through at least the middle of the Qing dynasty.

² For a late Ming, early seventeenth-century example with three nipple-shaped feet, very short neck, everted lip, gilt-splashed decoration, and slightly smaller with a diameter of 30 cm, see Christie's New York, *Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art*, Sale 6044, December 2, 1985, p. 179, lot no. 377.

³ For a comparable tripod censer of similar size, overall form, and handle decoration, but with more extensive areas of gilding and a six-character Xuande mark (*Da Ming Xuande nian zhi* 大明宣德年製), see Christie's New York, *Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art*, Sale 8608, March 20–21, 1997, pp. 94–95, lot no. 303. For another bronze tripod censer with *chi*-dragon handles, low-relief decoration on the sides, nipple-shaped feet, apocryphal six-character Xuande mark, and an accompanying domed openwork cover, probably Qing dynasty, Kangxi period, late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, see Sotheby's London, *Chinese Decorative Arts*, November 1, 1985, lot no. 397. Other similar examples include those illustrated in Spink & Son Ltd., *The Minor Arts of China III* (London: Spink & Son Ltd., 1987), p. 61, no. 71; Tan Xuehui, Qiu Donglian, and Wang Jianyu, *Zhongguo tongqi zaxiang mulu* (Haikou: Nanfang chuban she, 1999), p. 16 (upper right).

No. 21

灑金銅雙龍首耳狻猊獅多紋海棠花式大瓶

*Lobed Vase with Dragon-Head Handles and
Relief Decoration of Mythical Animals*

Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Kangxi period (1662–1722) through

Qianlong period (1736–1795), first half of the 18th century

Cast bronze with applied gold splashes, with an induced patina, and extensive cold-working
including the reign mark; height 41 cm, width 27.3 cm

Collection of Robert E. Kresko, on loan to the Saint Louis Art Museum

2004.273

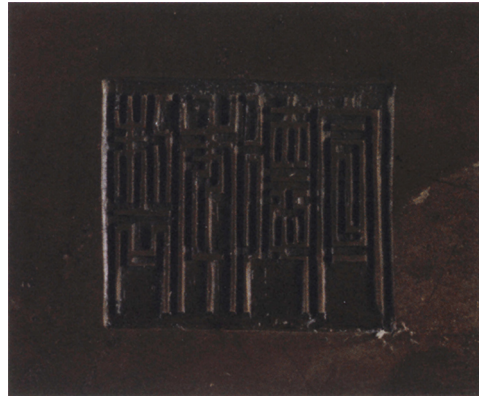
This imposing vase is an oval quatrefoil in cross-section and resembles a wide, lobed baluster in silhouette. A tall and slightly tapered foot supports the bulbous lobes of the body, each of the four sides being decorated in low relief with a mythical animal seen in three-quarter view while striking a pose. Just above the level of the animals, the body of the vase slopes upward to a constricted neck, on either side of which projects the head of a dragon that continues in cylindrical section to form a loop handle. The neck then flares outward and upward to a wide quatrefoil mouth whose rim dimensions exceed those of the foot ring. On the slightly recessed base is a rectangular cartouche containing a four-character apocryphal reign mark reading *Xuande nian zhi* 宣德年製 (“Made in the Xuande era”) in elongated seal-script style.¹ All the visible exterior surfaces of the vase, including the upper portion of the trumpet neck’s interior, are decorated with variously sized gold splashes, probably with the so-called fire-gilding process. This would have entailed applying an amalgam of gold and mercury to selected areas and then heating the vessel. After the mercury had been driven off, a layer of gold would be left adhering to the base metal; the gilt layers could be built up by repeating this process as many times as necessary to achieve the desired result.

The form of this vase is less common in bronze prior to the Qing dynasty, but the known examples are remarkable in one way or another.² There is a similarly shaped Ming-dynasty lobed cloisonné enamel flower vase in the National Palace Museum, Taipei.³ The quatrefoil-lobed vase form lent itself well to the intricate decoration found on cloisonné enamel wares and continued to be made in that medium during the subsequent Qing dynasty.⁴ Beginning in the early eighteenth century, there was a trend to decorate the sides of porcelain vessels with three or four mythical or auspicious animals in underglaze copper red or cobalt blue.⁵ This development must have influenced bronze decoration to a considerable degree, as is evident in this vase and in a tripod jar with bovine-head handles and relief decoration of mythical animals in the Kresko collection discussed elsewhere in this volume (cat. 33).





Detail of side of vessel



View of apocryphal reign mark on the bottom of the vessel's body

None of the four mythical beasts depicted on the body of this vase are *qilin* 麒麟, which should be represented with cloven hooves. All these animals have pawed and clawed feet, thereby disqualifying them from being *qilin*. At first glance, they appear to be similar, especially because they all have flowing manes that conceal parts of the head, but in fact significant differences can be seen. The two beasts on the wider front and back of the vase could be mythical creatures known as *suanni* 狻猊, which are akin to, and sometimes interchanged or mistaken for, Buddhist lion-dogs (*fo shi* 佛獅 or *shizi* 獅子).⁶

As for the two animals directly under the loop handles, the prominent horizontal scales seen on their chests may indicate that they are legendary single-horned beasts known as *xiezhi* 獬豸.⁷ According to legend, a *xiezhi* is able to distinguish between right and wrong; it can also smell an evil or immoral person from a distance and then tear him or her to pieces. Because the beast is associated with this special judicial ability, its image was adopted for the rank insignia badges of imperial censors (*yu shi* 御史).⁸ These four mythical animals, as well as the dragon heads at the top of the loop handles, are very finely worked so that even the minute details of their anatomy, creatively imagined, help to impart a semblance of reality.

The taste for quatrefoil-lobed vases in bronze continued for some time after this piece was produced, but the decoration became less refined. More often than not, the baroque and visually crowded treatment of details in later pieces serve to emphasize the early eighteenth-century stateliness of form and decoration so well captured by the lobed vase in the Kresko collection.⁹

Technical Notes

The vase and handles appear to be integrally cast, while the base, which also has gold splashes, is a separate sheet soldered into place just inside the foot. The handles and figures of the animals show extensive and adept cold-working, which includes a repeated punchwork pattern. It is possible that the animal figures were cast as protruding “blanks” and then carved. Chisel marks indicate that the reign mark on the underside has been extensively or perhaps completely cold-worked.

Provenance

John Sparks Ltd., London, until 1991; Christie's London, 1991.

Published

Christie's London, *Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art*, Sale 4674, December 9, 1991, pp. 24–25, lot no. 54.

Exhibited

“In the Shadow of Dragons: The Robert Kresko Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes,” The Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas, Texas, March 7–September 9, 2001.

¹ See n.1 of No. 20 in this volume, where it is noted that the distinctive rectilinear style in a type of Xuande marks may appear in character groups of two (*Xuande* 宣德), three (*Xuande nian* 宣德年), or four (*Xuande nian zhi* 宣德年製) within a square or rectangle.

² One of the few extant Ming examples is a vessel dated 1427 formerly belonging to Hosokawa Morisada 細川護貞 (1912–2005) and now in the Eisei-Bunko Museum, Tokyo, in Hosokawa Morisada, *Ittokuroku* (Tokyo: Chuokoronsha, 1982), p. 26, pl. 30 (illustration), pp. 133–34, pl. 30 (descriptive text in Japanese). Possibly a genuine bronze of the Xuande period (1426–1435), this modestly sized piece also has attractive gold-splashed decoration.

³ This distinctively lobed vase has gilt bronze dragon side-handles (possibly added later), *taotie* masks, and other formal decoration. The base bears a mark of the Jingtai period (1450–1456), but it is likely from the second half of the sixteenth century or early seventeenth century; listed in Royal Academy of Arts, *The Chinese Exhibition: A Commemorative Catalogue of the International Exhibition of Chinese Art, Royal Academy of Arts, November 1935–March 1936* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1936), p. 89, cat. no. 2035; discussed in Sir Harry Garner, *Chinese and Japanese Cloisonné Enamels* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1962), p. 64 (textual description) and pl. 46 (illustration); and illustrated in *Gugong wenwu yuekan* (The National Palace Museum Monthly of Chinese Art), vol. 11, no. 12, cumulative no. 132 (March 1994), p. 1.

⁴ See, for example, a pair of turquoise-ground, lobed vases decorated with rocks and flowers of the four seasons, eighteenth to early nineteenth century, cloisonné enamel, in Christie's London, *Fine Chinese Export Ceramics and Works of Art*, Sale 5167, May 9, 1994, p. 100, lot no. 227.

⁵ See, for example, the following Kangxi-period, Jingdezhen-ware pieces: bottle vase with four mythical animals, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (50.1606), in Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, *The Charles B. Hoyt Collection: Memorial Exhibition, February 13–March 30, 1952* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1952), p. 112, cat. no. 445; a pair of bottle vases, each with three mythical beasts, formerly in the collection of Mildred R. and Rafi Y. Mottahedeh, in David Sanctuary Howard and John Ayers, *China for the West: Chinese Porcelain & Other Decorative Arts for Export Illustrated from the Mottahedeh Collection* (London and New York: Sotheby Parke Bernet Publications, 1978), vol. 1, p. 86, cat. no. 43; and a bottle vase with three mythical beasts, each with a bushy tail and one foreleg raised, in Sotheby's Hong Kong, *Fine Chinese Ceramics*, November 13, 1990, lot no. 260.

⁶ A distant inspiration for this kind of lion-dog decoration on the sides of an object may be found on works such as an exquisite eleventh-century reliquary with Buddhist figures on the upper side panels and individual striding animals on the four lower ogival side panels; excavated in 1966 at the site of the Huiguang Pagoda 慧光塔, Rui'an 瑞安, Zhejiang province, Northern Song dynasty (960–1127), wood-core lacquer with seed pearls, Zhejiang Provincial Museum, Hangzhou; in Sherman E. Lee, *China: 5,000 Years: Innovation and Transformation in the Arts* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 1998), cat. no. 72.

⁷ See Wang Qi and Wang Siyi, comps., *San cai tu hui* (106 *juan*), *Niaoshou* 鳥獸 (“Birds and Beasts”) section, *juan* 3, for late Ming illustrations and descriptions of the *qilin* (folio 2a-b), the *suanni* (folio 3a-b), and the *xiezhi* (folio 4a-b); reprint ed. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1988), vol. 3, pp. 2201–02.

⁸ See Ray Huang, 1587, *A Year of No Significance: The Ming Dynasty in Decline* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 53–54.

⁹ One such parcel-gilt bronze example from the late Qianlong period or later has the ornate decoration of lion-headed ring handles and four ogival panels depicting grains and grasses, Hong Kong Museum of Art (C1979.0022), in William Watson, “Categories of Post-Yuan Decorative Bronzes,” *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society*, vol. 46 (1981–1982), p. 26, pl. 14.

No. 22

灑金銅平口三足素圓鼎式香爐

Tripod Censer with Splashed-Gold Decoration

Qing dynasty (1644–1911), 18th century

Cast bronze with applied gold splashes, with a pigmented coating over induced surface color

height 7.3 cm, width 15.2 cm

Collection of Robert E. Kresko

This censer of compressed form and circular cross-section has a squat bombé body that is supported on three short, solid “splayed-hoof” feet. It has a waisted neck with a wide-rimmed everted mouth that is slightly raised at the outer edge. The overall proportions of the censer are finely balanced, with subtle detailing in the reveals at the neck. The mottled brown body is visually enhanced by variously shaped and sized gold splashes, which are randomly distributed over the vertical edge of the lip, the body, and the legs, as well as the underside of the body. Sensual in form and sumptuous in decoration, yet modest in scale and easy to handle, the censer lent itself to being turned over and admired when not in use.

A countersunk rectangle on the base of the censer, aligned with the axis of the front and center foot of the vessel, contains a four-character mark reading *Xuande nian zhi* 宣德年製 (“Made in the Xuande reign”).¹ The apocryphal reign mark is rendered in relief, in a distinctively elongated and rectilinear style of seal script, and cold-worked to bring out the crispness of the characters. The interior of the censer is flat-bottomed and left unfinished.

Bronze censers with similar body and leg forms, as well as gilded or splashed gold decoration, are known to have been made in the earlier part of the Ming dynasty during the fifteenth century.² However, the type without handles and featuring a much cleaner silhouette became popular only in the late Ming and early Qing periods. Such censers, being relatively low in height, were sometimes elevated by matching bronze stands or placed on carved wood stands.

The technical precision that went into the casting, decoration, and finishing of the Kresko censer is exemplary. It is among the best bronzes of its type made during the eighteenth century.³ It is so well made that it may have been commissioned by, or presented to, a member of the Qing court for use in a palace setting. Less opulent censers of this form, without the splashed-gold decoration, were also produced for widespread use among scholars and commoners from the late Ming period to the end of the Qing dynasty.⁴ Interestingly, some of these censers bear private maker’s marks or studio names rather than apocryphal Xuande marks, which suggests that they were prized as artifacts of their own time rather than those of a romanticized reign period in the distant past.⁵





View of apocryphal reign mark on the bottom of the vessel's body

Technical Notes

The censer is integrally and well cast without apparent flaws, and nicely finished. The splashes are small but thickly applied. The reign mark shows tool marks from cold-working. A series of parallel lines is visible on the interior, probably transferred from the mold.

Exhibited

"In the Shadow of Dragons: The Robert Kresko Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes," The Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas, Texas, March 7–September 9, 2001.

¹ See n. 1 of No. 20 in this volume, where it is noted that the distinctive rectilinear style in a type of Xuande marks may appear in character groups of two (*Xuande* 宣德), three (*Xuande nian* 宣德年), or four (*Xuande nian zhi* 宣德年製) within a square or rectangle.

² One example, probably from the early fifteenth century and part of what has been called the "first austere style," is illustrated in William Watson, "Categories of Post-Yuan Decorative Bronzes," *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society*, vol. 46 (1981–1982), p. 14, pl. 1. Another unusual and important Ming example is a censer with loop ears and Persian-style designs made during the Jingtai period (1450–1456) and dated 1450, Capital Museum, Beijing, in Cheng Changxin and Zhang Xiande, "Ming jinpian tonglu he cuojin lilu," *Wenwu* (Cultural Relics), no. 283 (1979, no. 12), pp. 84–85, figs. 3–4; and Yu Jincheng and Song Dachuan, comps., *Ming Qing tongqi Beijing wenwu jingcui daxi: Qingtong qi juan* (Gems of Beijing Cultural Relics Series: Bronzes) [Beijing: Beijing chubanshe (Beijing Publishing House), 2002], illustrations section, p. 242, no. 269, and text section, p. 28, no. 269.

³ For a similar censer of this type, period, splashed-gold decoration, and quality, see Sotheby's Hong Kong, *Fine Chinese Ceramics, Works of Art, Jade Carvings and Jadeite Jewellery*, April 27–28, 1993, lot no. 258. A selection of such Ming and Qing censers (with Xuande marks) is also illustrated in Chen Qinghong, *Da Ming Xuande lu zonglun* (Yongkang, Tainan, Taiwan: Juguang chubanshe, 1996), pp. 106–14, color pls. 88–101.

⁴ For two comparable undecorated bronze censers in the collection of Yang Bingzhen, Taipei, with four-character Xuande marks in the elongated and rectilinear style as in the Kresko piece, see Guoli lishi bowu guan (National Museum of History), *Jin yu qing yan: Yang Bingzhen xiansheng zhencang Ming Qing tong lu* (Golden Jade and Azure Mist: Bronze Censers of the Ming and Qing in the Collection of Mr. Yang Bingzhen) [Taipei: Guoli lishi bowu guan (National Museum of History), 1996], p. 151, cat. no. 55 and p. 152, cat. no. 56.

⁵ See, for instance, two undecorated examples formerly in the collection of Wang Shixiang and Yuan Quanyou, Beijing: one with a four-character mark (*Li Qujiang zhi* 李曲江製) on the base, and the other with a four-character mark (*Yutang qingwan* 玉堂清玩) on the base, with accompanying wood stand with design of the *taiji* 太極 diagram, published in Wang Shixiang, *Zizhen ji: Lisong ju zhangwu zhi* (Self-Cherished Treasures of Twin-Pine Studio: A Listing of Items) (Beijing: Shenghuo, dushu, xinzhi Sanlian shudian, 2003), p. 34, cat. no. 2.21, and p. 16, cat. no. 2.4, respectively. These were subsequently dispersed at auction; see Zhongguo Jiade guoji paimai youxian gongsi (China Guardian Auctions Co., Ltd.), *Lisong ju zhangwu: Wang Shixiang, Yuan Quanyou zhencang Zhongguo yishu pin* (Treasures of Twin-Pine Studio: Works of Art Collection by Wang Shixiang and Yuan Quanyou), November 26, 2003, lot nos. 1115 and 1117, respectively.

No. 23

雙龍耳浮雕雲中寶珠紋三足銅香爐

Tripod Censer with Design of Flaming Pearl Chased by Dragons

Qing dynasty (1644–1911), 18th century

Cast bronze with induced surface color and remnants of a tinted coating

height 11.4 cm, width 18.2 cm, diameter of mouth 14.5 cm

Collection of Robert E. Kresko



This small but striking censer has a shallow bombé body supported by three short tapered feet. On the sides of the everted rim are two dragons, set in such a way that the legs on the inside of the vessel are perched on the flat top of the rim and those on the other side of the body are planted on the sloping sides of the censer's shoulder and belly. The arched backs of the dragons form the handles of the censer while their tails continue curling down the side. In addition to the dynamic expressions and postures of the dragons, great pains were taken to render minute details of each one's anatomy—eyebrows, beard, mane, scales, spine, and clawed feet—resulting in highly tactile surfaces that delight the senses of sight and touch. Unlike some dragon-handled censers where the dragons are placed facing



Side view of the censer



View of apocryphal reign mark on the bottom of the censer's body

opposite directions, the dragons here are oriented in the same direction, their open jaws aiming for the flaming pearl that appears to float on a bed of *ruyi*-headed clouds over the central foot of the vessel. The pearl is exquisitely articulated with several concentric linear bands, two bands of tiny circles, and small tongues of flame that dart across part of its upper surface, as if to convey its luminescence. At the center of the censer's fully finished bottom is a countersunk rectangular cartouche with a six-character reign mark reading *Da Ming Xuande nian zhi* 大明宣德年製 ("Made in the Xuande era of the Great Ming"). The vertical axis of the mark is aligned with the front foot of the tripod and the pearl above it. The frontal aspect of this object is thus conveyed with great emphasis. Apart from the pearl and the two dragon handles, the rest of the censer is undecorated.

The decorative motif of confronted dragons chasing flaming pearls alludes to the continual pursuit of wisdom by these benevolent creatures; it is believed to have originated in Central Asia and probably made its first appearance in China during the Sui dynasty (581–618). One of the earliest surviving instances of this motif is found on the ring pommel of a sword, made around A.D. 600 and reportedly discovered in an imperial tomb at Beiqieshan 北厥山 near Luoyang, Henan province.¹ By the Tang dynasty (618–907) the motif had become ubiquitous and could be found on all manner and media of ornament.

Although the reign mark on this object is clearly apocryphal, the tripod's body and feet may be juxtaposed favorably against those on vessels that are more credible products of the Xuande period (1426–1435). One such example is a tripod censer in the Field Museum, Chicago, with “heaven-soaring” handles and very fine relief decoration of dragons chasing a flaming pearl amidst clouds.² The bold relief of the flaming pearl may also be compared to the high-relief decoration of dragons amidst clouds on the body of a covered tripod censer dated 1431 and formerly in the collection of O. B. Johnston, Los Angeles.³ Few late Ming or Qing bronzes display such immaculate casting and finishing; even fewer succeed in achieving a sophisticated combination of detail and restraint in their form and decoration.⁴

Technical Notes

The censer is well cast and the exterior beautifully finished. The handles and body were cast integrally, and the details on the dragons were also cast, though undoubtedly they required finishing. Traces of file marks were left on the inside rim of the censer, and the heads of bronze casting pins are visible on the interior. Tool marks around the characters of the reign mark are evidence of cold-working.

Provenance

Sheldon L. and Barbara R. Breitbart, New York, until 1997; Sotheby's New York, 1997.

Published

Sotheby's New York, *Fine Chinese Ceramics, Furniture and Works of Art*, Sale 6963, March 19, 1997, lot no. 27.

Exhibited

“In the Shadow of Dragons: The Robert Kresko Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes,” The Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas, Texas, March 7–September 9, 2001.

1 Sword, iron with silver and gilt bronze mountings, with ring pommel in the form of two dragons confronting a (now lost) pearl, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Clarence H. Mackay, 1930 (30.65.2); illustrated in Helmut Nickel, “The Dragon and the Pearl,” *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, vol. 26 (1991), pp. 139 and 141, fig. 2.

² Ming dynasty, dated by a sixteen-character inscription on the base to 1431, Mrs. T. B. Blackstone Expedition, Berthold Laufer Collection, 1908–1910, published in Sheila Riddell, *Dated Chinese Antiquities, 600–1650* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber Limited, 1979), p. 134, pl. 121.

³ Incense burner with coiled dragon handles and pierced cover with dragon knob, with six-character mark on base enclosing two dragons; *ibid.*, p. 135, pl. 122.

⁴ See, for instance, a tripod censer with relief dragon design and hornless dragon handles, six-character mark in relief within circle surrounded by two dragons chasing a flaming pearl, gilt-splashed bronze, collection of Steven Hung (Hong Sanxiong) and Lindy Chern (Chen Lingyu), Taipei, in Guoli lishi bowu guan bianji weiyuan hui (Editorial Committee of the National Museum of History), *Shuangqing cang lu (Chinese Incense Burners: Collection of Steven Hung & Lindy Chern)* [Taipei: Guoli lishi bowu guan (National Museum of History), 2000], p. 143, cat. no. 116.

No. 24

螭龍如意雲紋簋式銅香爐

Censer with Handles in the Form of Chi-Dragon Heads

Qing dynasty (1644–1911), 18th century

Cast bronze with cast and cold-worked decoration, with a tinted coating over an induced surface color

height 12.2 cm, width 31.5 cm, diameter of mouth 23.3 cm, diameter of base 19.8 cm

Collection of Robert E. Kresko

A highly energized decorative scheme embellishes the exterior of this weighty bronze censer of bombé form raised on a low and slightly splayed foot ring. The sides are cast in relief with a pair of three-clawed *chi*-dragons striding amidst clouds in the clockwise direction. The heads of both dragons protrude at right angles on opposite sides, functioning as erstwhile handles. The profile views of the dragons' bodies contrast with the heads looking straight out, and the frontality is considerably emphasized by the symmetrical disposition of the flowing mane, whiskers, and beard of each dragon. The rest of the decoration consists of single or grouped cloud scrolls, judiciously and sparingly placed, some on the dragons' bodies and others resting against a plain background. On the base of the censer is a countersunk rectangle with a six-character regular-script mark that reads *Da Ming Xuande nian zhi* 大明宣德年製 ("Made in the Xuande era of the Great Ming").

The dating of this censer is challenging as it has both Ming and Qing features. For works made during the transitional phase between these two dynasties, a seventeenth-century date conveniently covers both the late Ming and the early Qing.¹ However, the stylistic indicators here point emphatically to the fifteenth century *and* the eighteenth century, but not to the two intervening centuries.

Unlike many later bronzes with apocryphal Xuande marks, an early fifteenth-century date for this censer could not be ruled out from the start. The distinctive cloud scrolls convincingly recall those found in other materials, such as carved red lacquerware and underglaze-decorated porcelains from the Yongle (1403–1424) and Xuande (1426–1435) reigns.² An even earlier precedent for these cloud designs may be seen on the Nine-Dragon Screen (Jiulong bi 九龍壁) of 1392 at the palace of Zhu Gui 朱桂 (1374–1446; thirteenth son of the Ming founder Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋) in Datong 大同, Shanxi province.³ The cloud scrolls on the Kresko censer do not resemble the typical designs of clouds in ceramics, lacquer, and textiles of the Qing dynasty. On the other hand, the scaleless dragons do not conform to the more tightly coiled ones in early fifteenth-century art, except perhaps in the dramatic stances of their sharply clawed feet. The dragons also do not resemble the *chi*-dragons found on so many seventeenth-century works of art from the late Ming and early Qing; the formality and balance of the protruding heads is much more consonant with eighteenth-century examples.



Such incongruities may be explained by the revival of early Ming style in architecture, metalwork, and other forms of decorative art during the first half of the eighteenth century. The most important example is the row of ten carved marble columns on the front of the Hall of the Great Completer (Dacheng dian 大成殿) at the Temple of Confucius in Qufu, Shandong province. Originally erected in 1500, they were recarved (after a fire) between 1724 and 1730 by command of the Yongzheng emperor (r. 1723–1735).⁴ The dramatic late fifteenth-century style of the dragons and scrolling clouds on the columns were so admired by the Qing rulers that the earlier design and style of carving were faithfully preserved. Another instance of a Qing revival of early Ming decoration may be seen in a pair of gilt bronze chime bells (*bianzhong* 編鍾) from the Qianlong period (1736–1795) and dated to 1744.⁵ Three of the five decorated registers on the sides of the bells feature cloud scrolls



Side view of the censer



View of apocryphal reign mark on the censer's base

with much the same design and crisp relief as those on the Kresko censer. In addition, each of the handles for suspending the bells is in the form of two dragons facing in opposite directions, their prominent heads having a similar mien to those on the censer. These examples in architecture and ritual musical instruments point to imperially sanctioned revivals of early Ming designs during both the Yongzheng and Qianlong reigns.

Given this contextual framework, it is clear that the Kresko censer belongs to the eighteenth century but pays homage to the style of the fifteenth century. The object to which it is most closely related, a slightly smaller *gui*-form censer in the Victoria and Albert Museum, has a similar decoration of three-clawed dragons and clouds in high relief as well as a six-character Xuande mark on the base. As on the Kresko piece, the dragon heads project furthest from the body and serve as handles.⁶ A relatively small but rather more ornately decorated and parcel-gilt example was published in Hong Kong; it was thought to be from the Xuande period, but its date has never been fully established.⁷ Another example of this type of censer with a six-character Xuande mark was offered by Sydney L. Moss Ltd., London. Said to be either Ming or Qing (fifteenth to seventeenth century), it is roughly the same size as the piece in the Victoria and Albert Museum, though its design of dragons amidst clouds is less high-relief overall.⁸ More recently, another similar censer from the collection of Wang Du 王度 (Wellington Wang) was exhibited in Taipei.⁹

Technical Notes

This heavy censer was integrally cast, with minimal use of cold-working. The exterior of the censer is fairly well finished overall, with neatly executed repairs of casting flaws. The reign mark on the underside shows evidence of cold-working.

Provenance

Sotheby's Hong Kong, 1992; J. J. Lally & Co., New York, 1992–1995.

Published

Sotheby's Hong Kong, *Fine Chinese Ceramics, Works of Art, Furniture, Jade Carvings and Jadeite Jewellery*, October 27–28, 1992 (Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 1992), lot no. 192; Ma Jinhong, *Ming Qing tongqi* (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2004), p. 55, no. 4.

Exhibited

"In the Shadow of Dragons: The Robert Kresko Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes," The Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas, Texas, March 7–September 9, 2001.

¹ This was more or less the case when the censer appeared at auction; the sale catalogue dated it as "late Ming dynasty, 17th century"; see Sotheby's Hong Kong, *Fine Chinese Ceramics, Works of Art, Furniture, Jade Carvings and Jadeite Jewellery*, October 27–28, 1992, lot no. 192.

² See, for instance, a round carved red lacquer plaque with design of dragons and lotus flowers recently exhibited at the Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst in Berlin (since December 2006, known as the Museum für Asiatische Kunst): Ming dynasty, Xuande period, collection of Klaus F. Naumann, Tokyo (Inv. No. N 98), in Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, *A Japanese Taste for Lacquer: The Klaus F. Naumann Collection: Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst, Berlin 2006 (Eine japanische Leidenschaft: Die Lacke der Sammlung Klaus F. Naumann: Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst, Berlin 2006)*, catalogue by Antje Papist-Matsuo; with contributions by Klaus F. Naumann, Akio Haino, and Willibald Veit (Berlin: Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 2006), pp. 142–43, cat. no. 55.

³ This 45.5-meter long structure is the oldest surviving Nine-Dragon Screen in China; it depicts nine very lively four-clawed dragons amidst clouds and waves using high-relief glazed bricks.

⁴ Illustrated in Annette L. Juliano, *Treasures of China* (New York: Richard Marek Publishers, Inc., 1981),

p. 97; Liang Ssu-ch'eng, *A Pictorial History of Chinese Architecture: A Study of the Development of Its Structural System and the Evolution of Its Types* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 1984), fig. 60a; Kodai Oriento hakubutsukan, Asahi tsūshinsha, et al., comps. and eds. *Kōshi no furusato yonsennen ten: Santō-shō bunbutsu* (N.p. [Tokyo]: Asahi tsūshinsha [Asatsu Inc.], 1992), pp. 8–10; Fu Xinian et al., *Chinese Architecture*, English text edited and expanded by Nancy S. Steinhardt (New Haven and London: Yale University Press; Beijing: New World Press, 2002), p. 196, detail of fig. 6.23, and p. 229, fig. 6.23; Musée national des Arts asiatiques-Guimet, *Confucius: À l'aube de l'humanisme chinois* (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 2003), p. 175, cat. no. 131.

⁵ Originally part of a carillon of sixteen such bells, the pair is now in the Musée et domaine nationaux du château de Fontainebleau, France (F 1363 C); published in Colombe Samoyault-Verlet et al., *Le musée chinois de l'impératrice Eugénie* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1994), p. 47, fig. 34.

⁶ Diameter 19.5 cm, weight 1.9 kg, published in Stephen W. Bushell, *Chinese Art*, 2nd ed. (London: Published under the authority of the Board of Education, 1909), vol. 1, fig. 59; and Rose Kerr, "A Preliminary Note on Some Qing Bronze Types," *Oriental Art*, n.s. vol. 26, no. 4 (Winter 1980–1981), p. 454, fig. 10.

⁷ Published in Gerard Tsang and Hugh Moss, *Arts from the Scholar's Studio: Catalogue of an Exhibition Presented by the Oriental Ceramic Society of Hong Kong and the Fung Ping Shan Museum, University of Hong Kong, 24 October to 13 December 1986* (Hong Kong: The Oriental Ceramic Society of Hong Kong, 1986), pp. 164–65, no. 139.

⁸ Bronze with gilding, in Sydney L. Moss Ltd., *The Second Bronze Age: Later Chinese Metalwork*, catalogue by Paul Moss and Gerard Hawthorn (London: Sydney L. Moss Ltd., 1991), cat. no. 44.

⁹ Gilt incense burner with elephant-head handles and dragon decoration, six-character Xuande mark on base, published in Guoli lishi bowu guan (National Museum of History), *Xiangxun xianglu nuanlu (Censers, Incense Burners and Hand Warmers: Wellington Wang Collection)* [Taipei: Guoli lishi bowu guan (National Museum of History), 2000], p. 158, cat. no. 127. However, no date was assigned to this censer, nor to any other object in the catalogue.

No. 25

鍍金銅獸首耳藍查體梵文簋式香爐連座

Censer with Mantra in Lança Script and Matching Stand

Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Kangxi period (1662–1722) through Qianlong period (1736–1795), 18th century

Cast bronze with gilding, with induced surface color and remnants of tinted coatings

overall height 26.7 cm, width 45.7 cm

Saint Louis Art Museum, Partial and promised gift of Robert E. Kresko

24:2005a,b



This heavy, circular *gui*-type censer has a bombé body with a constricted neck that flares upward to form the lip. Two lug handles on either side take the form of gilded animal masks in high relief, which are framed by tight curls suggesting the manes of lions. The exterior front and back sides of the censer are each decorated with three characters in Lança script, all sharply rendered in relief from the smooth surface of the body and enhanced by gilding. The censer is accompanied by an elaborate stand that was custom-designed to support it. The base of the censer rests on a flat ring that is slightly recessed from the top of the stand. A band of downwardly pointing and outwardly flaring stylized lotus petals forms the uppermost visible register of decoration on the stand. The lotus petals rest on a band of undulating form that simulates lotus leaves, which protrude beyond a curved neck that flares outward to a foot rim. The foot rim is in turn supported by the outstretched arms of four squatting frogs. Like the animal-mask lug handles and the six characters of the mantra on the censer, the central portions of the stylized lotus petals and the frogs are highlighted through gilding.

The Musée Cernuschi in Paris has an earlier example of a bronze censer with a gilded six-syllable Lança inscription. It is a small tripod vessel with a bombé body, straight-sided neck, thick mouth rim, and tall pierced handles with curved profiles. It has incised designs inlaid with gold and silver and bears an eight-character inscription on the base dating it to the Chenghua period (1465–1487) of the Ming dynasty.¹ The raised relief characters on the exterior of the Kresko censer form the well-known six-syllable Sanskrit Buddhist mantra *om maṇi padme hūṃ*, which is usually translated as “Om, the Jewel of the Lotus!”² The mantra is closely associated with the four-armed manifestation of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (Śadakṣari Lokeśvara, “Lord of the Six Syllables”).³ In Tibetan Buddhism, it is believed that whoever recites the mantra out loud or silently will draw benevolence and blessings from Avalokiteśvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion.

First recorded in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, the mantra was already widely recited in China and other parts of the Mongol empire during the thirteenth century. In Tibet and elsewhere in China, it appeared in visual form on prayer flags and prayer wheels and engraved into rocks in the landscape (*mani* stones).⁴ While standard Tibetan script could be used to write out the mantra, it was another script of Nepalese origin, variously known as Lança or Rañjanā, that was considered to be the most decorative.⁵ The most elegant script associated with Buddhism, Lança script, appeared on architectural members of temples and monasteries as well as in religious manuscripts, where it could be written in gold or silver ink, or both. In Tibet, Lança script is used for writing the Sanskrit titles of Buddhist texts, which have been translated from Sanskrit into Tibetan, but it may also appear as a parallel script in certain bilingual texts featuring both Sanskrit and Tibetan.



Detail of censer and stand showing three characters of the six-character inscription



View of apocryphal maker's mark on base of censer's body

The six-syllable mantra, when written in Lanṅa script, is read from left to right. However, on this censer the characters are arranged in a sequence to be read from right to left. The first syllable, *om*, is represented at the far right with a diacritical mark above it, and the last syllable, *hūm*, at the far left on the opposite side of the censer, is also surmounted by a diacritical mark. The reversal of the syllable sequence may have been an accommodation to the Chinese, who read characters from top to bottom and from right to left.

The base of the censer features a six-character mark reading *Yunjian Hu Wenming zhi* 雲間胡文明制 (“Made by Hu Wenming of Yunjian”). The regular-script characters are contained within a double square cartouche, the thickness of the inner square being the same width as the strokes of the characters, while the outer square is three times as thick. Although the cold-worked characters are legible and well formed (with the horizontal strokes rising at a slight angle from left to right), they do not conform to those in any known and accepted cast mark of Hu Wenming and his atelier. Rather, they reflect the studiously elegant regular-script calligraphy of the early Qing period. In addition, the form and design of the censer and its accompanying stand are not part of the typologies associated with bronzes attributed to Hu Wenming.⁶ Despite the spurious mark, which was probably added at the time of manufacture or shortly thereafter in order to capitalize on the reputation of Hu Wenming, the censer and its sumptuous stand are fine examples of eighteenth-century Qing bronze casting and hold their own with considerable aplomb.

Technical Notes

The censer is thick-walled and heavy. Indications of extensive cold-working are found around the characters (perhaps these were “blanks” to be customized) and the details of the animal-head handles; the inscription on the underside was also cold-worked. There is no lip on the rim of the bowl to accept a lid.

The fabrication of the censer cannot be confirmed without further analysis, including radiography. Usually, handles sit on the solid wall of a vessel; however, in this case, the handles are hollow and are placed over holes in the censer. How they are attached is not clear; perhaps they were cast on. It is possible that the foot or bottom of the censer was cast separately and attached.

The frogs were cast separately and attached to the ring of the stand. Plates have been cold-worked to sit inside the openings on the undersides of the frogs; each plate bears a similar cold-worked pattern in the center. Perhaps something (such as a *sūtra*) has been inserted in each of the frog cavities and sealed with the plates.

Provenance

Christie's London, 2001; Sydney L. Moss Ltd., London, 2001; Collection of Robert E. Kresko, St. Louis, 2001–2005.

Published

Christie's London, *Fine Chinese Ceramics and Chinese Export Ceramics and Works of Art*, Sale 6510, November 13, 2001, p. 160, lot no. 190.

¹ Musée Cernuschi, Paris (M.C. 171; legs Henri Cernuschi, 1896), in *The Arts of the Ming Dynasty: An Exhibition Organised by The Arts Council of Great Britain and The Oriental Ceramic Society* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain; London: The Oriental Ceramic Society, 1958), p. 76, cat. no. 285 (descriptive text), and pl. 77, cat. no. 285 (illustration); R. Soame Jenyns and William Watson, *Chinese Art II: Gold, Silver, Later Bronzes, Cloisonné, Cantonese Enamel, Lacquer, Furniture, Wood*, rev. ed. (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1980), p. 94, no. 60 and pl. 60; and Gilles Béguin, ed., *Arts de l'Asie au musée Cernuschi* (Paris: Éditions des musées de la Ville de Paris; Paris: Éditions Findakly, 2000), pp. 146–47 (illustration and descriptive text) and pp. 206–207.

² Transliterated syllable by syllable: *om ma ni pa dme hūm*. The mantra is known in Chinese as *liu zi zhen yan* 六字真言, and in Tibetan as *yi ge drug pa*.

³ For examples of Ming and Qing visual representations of Śaṅkṣari Lokeśvara accompanied by the six-syllable mantra, see *Avalokiteśvara as Śaṅkṣari Lokeśvara*, Ming dynasty (1368–1644), early fifteenth century, silk damask, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Purchase, Sir Joseph Hotung Gift, 2002 (2002.271), in James C. Y. Watt and Denise Patry Leidy, *Defining Yongle: Imperial Art in Early Fifteenth-Century China* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005),

p. 83, pl. 33; and anonymous, *Śaṅkṣari Lokeśvara*, Qing dynasty, Qianlong period (1736–1795), hanging scroll, silk embroidery and couching on silk, Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, Gift of the Walter and Phyllis Shorenstein Fund (1989.4), in Marsha Weidner, ed., *Latter Days of the Law: Images of Chinese Buddhism, 850–1850* (Lawrence, Kan.: Spencer Museum of Art, The University of Kansas, in association with Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), pp. 255–56, cat. no. 13, and pl. 6. An almost identical version of the latter embroidery, made in the same period, is in the National Palace Museum, Taipei; another version executed in silk tapestry (*kesi*) during the mid-eighteenth century is in the Potala Palace, Lhasa, Tibet.

⁴ The most remarkable example of a *mani* stone containing the six-syllable mantra was discovered in the 1940s in a cave at the Mogao Grottoes at Dunhuang, Gansu province. The stela was commissioned in 1348, during the late Yuan dynasty, by Sulaiman 速來蠻, who was Prince of Xining (Xining wang 西寧王) from 1329 until his death in 1351, and other members of his court. The stone features the mantra engraved in six different scripts: Lança, Tibetan (in horizontal format, read from left to right), Uighur, 'Phags-pa, Tangut, and Chinese; a rubbing taken from the stela is in the collection of the National Library of China, Beijing.

⁵ The Lança script is also spelled *lan tsha*, *lan dza*, or *la nya tsha* in Tibetan; Rañjanā is also called Rañja. Lança has a syllabic alphabet, where each letter has an inherent vowel (“a”); additional vowels can be indicated using separate letters or diacritics. On Lança or Rañjanā script, see *Rañjana lipi varṇamālā* (*Rañjanā, pracalita va bhujimmola*) (*Ranjana, Prachalit, and Bhujinmol*) (Yala, Nepal: Lipi Thapu Guthu, 2004).

⁶ On Hu Wenming and examples of works attributed to him and his atelier, see Gerard Tsang and Hugh Li Moss, “Chinese Metalwork of the Hu Wenming Group,” in *International Asian Antiques Fair, Hong Kong, May 16th–19th, 1984, Hotel Furama Inter-Continental* (Hong Kong: Andamans East International Ltd., 1984), pp. 33–68; Gerard Tsang and Hugh Moss, *Arts from the Scholar's Studio: Catalogue of an Exhibition Presented by the Oriental Ceramic Society of Hong Kong and the Fung Ping Shan Museum, University of Hong Kong, 24 October to 13 December 1986* (Hong Kong: The Oriental Ceramic Society of Hong Kong, 1986), pp. 110–11, cat. no. 73; pp. 134–35, cat. no. 103; pp. 190–91, cat. no. 168; pp. 232–33, cat. no. 220; pp. 240–41, cat. nos. 230–31; pp. 246–47, cat. no. 237; and pp. 252–53, cat. no. 246; Denise P. Leidy, Wai-fong Anita Siu, and James C. Y. Watt, “Chinese Decorative Arts,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, vol. 55, no. 1 (Summer 1997), pp. 11–12. For a Hu Wenming object in the Kresko collection, see No. 9 in this volume.

No. 26

帶壽紋座福壽八吉祥紋雙聯管式筆筒

Brush Holder in the Form of a Double Vase

Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Qianlong period (1736–1795), mid- to late 18th century

Cast bronze with cast and cold-worked decoration, with a pigmented wax over an induced surface color
height 18.7 cm, width 27.3 cm, depth 17.5 cm

Saint Louis Art Museum, Partial and promised gift of Robert E. Kresko

22:2005a,b



This brush holder consists of two joined cylindrical vases of equal height and diameter. On both front and back, the vases are visually linked by screenlike decorative elements at three points: at the top by a downward-pointed bat with outstretched wings carrying a medallion with the stylized *shou* 壽 (“longevity”) character; at the upper center by stylized cloudbands that extend to cover parts of the vases’ surfaces; and at the bottom by the outstretched forelegs of a mythical creature resembling a dragon whose upturned head and

open jaws seem to await the arrival of the *shou*-character medallion. Dispersed across the cylindrical surfaces are additional stylized cloudbands, and floating among them are the Eight Buddhist Emblems (*ba jixiang* 八吉祥). Each vase is supported on a short splayed foot with a thick foot ring. The recessed bases each have a countersunk rectangle at the center with a six-character apocryphal reign mark reading *Da Ming Xuande nian zhi* 大明宣德年製 (“Made in the Xuande era of the Great Ming”). The brush holder has a matching stand, which is shaped like a figure “8” with two additional segments at the center on either side to provide a visual threshold for the animals that project beyond the walls of the vases. At the center of each side of the stand is a round openwork design of a stylized *shou* character. Along the entire perimeter of the stand is a raised border; there are four areas with chiseled notches that correspond to the position of the dragon’s claws, so that when the brush holder is set on the stand, it appears as though the claws are firmly gripping the stand. The stand is raised on six small buttonlike feet that are linked within a continuous decorative apron. The underside of the stand is undecorated and unmarked.

Although the joined cylinders that make up the brush holder are utterly simple in form, the decoration is filled with complex meaning and symbolism, much of it dependent on homonyms in the Chinese language. At the most fundamental homonymic level, bats (*fu* 蝠) stand for blessings (*fu* 福) and riches (*fu* 富). By extension, a pair of bats means “double blessings” (*shuang fu* 雙福). A bat (*fu* 蝠) descending (*jiang* 降) from the sky (*tian* 天) is a rebus for “blessings descending from the heavens” (*fu cong tian jiang* 福從天降), while a bat depicted with a medallion containing the *shou* character means “May you possess both blessings and longevity” (*fu shou shuang quan* 福壽雙全).¹ Clouds (*yun* 雲) have long been associated with auspiciousness and fortune (*yun* 運) in China. They are the source of crop-nourishing rain and their lofty position in the skies links them to the notion of high rank. The rounded heads of the clouds seen on the brush holder are shaped like the head of *ruyi*-scepters (*ruyi* 如意 meaning “as you wish”).² Bats (*fu* 蝠) amidst clouds (*yun* 雲) is a rebus for “good fortune” (*fu yun* 福運).

The mythical creatures peering out and up from the center of both sides of the brush holder are shown only with their heads and three-clawed front legs. Their tense, crouching stances are reminiscent of the chimeras supporting phoenixes between double vases (No. 37). But their presence amidst auspicious clouds and bats seems to indicate that they may be dragons of some kind. It is possible that they represent *chi*-dragons (*chi long* 螭龍), but without their typically bifurcated tails it is not possible to confirm them as such. In Chinese popular mythology, *chi*-dragons are sometimes equated with the so-called *chi wen* 螭吻, said to be the second of nine sons of the dragon.³

The brush holder is decorated with the Eight Buddhist Emblems: the Dharma wheel (*falun* 法輪), conch (*faluo* 法螺), canopy (*baigai* 白蓋; also known as the “victory banner”),



Detail of the bottom of the brush holder showing apocryphal reign marks



View of the brush holder's stand

precious parasol (*baosan* 寶傘), lotus blossom (*lianhua* 蓮花), treasure vase (*baoping* 寶瓶), pair of golden fish (*jinyu* 金魚), and the endless knot (*panchang* 盤長).⁴ Among these, four are royal emblems associated with the Buddha (conch, canopy, parasol, and vase), while the other four symbolize Buddhist religious beliefs (wheel, lotus, fish, and knot). The emblems' order of arrangement has been variable over time.⁵ Except for the lotus blossom, shown with scrolling stems and leaves, the other emblems have fluttering ribbons and are depicted as though moving in the wind. This is especially the case with the canopy and parasol, which appear to be blown from left to right.

The date of this work of art may be ascertained from the decorative style. The design of the bats and cloudbands are very distinctive and characteristic of the Qianlong period. The decidedly baroque form of the bats may also be seen in the decoration of many porcelains and carved lacquerware of this period.⁶ They are much more stylized than the somewhat naturalistic bats seen in the earlier Kangxi and Yongzheng periods.⁷ The same grouping and massing of the cloudbands can be found in all kinds of carved decoration during the Qianlong period, but it is most discernible on court textiles and on representations of textiles by court artists.⁸ The superb casting and finishing of the object is also consistent with the best bronzes of the Qianlong period. Attentiveness to detail is equally evident on the matching stand, whose projecting rim allows the brush holder to be securely placed. Just below the stand's short neck, on the shoulder of the outwardly splayed apron, is a single line that echoes the shape of the rim. The apron border consists of a series of slightly raised double ogee curves, each of which terminates in a tiny scroll head, which in turn abuts one end of another C-scroll whose midsection rises above the foot knob. Openings under the ogee curves of the apron help to give the entire ensemble a much lighter feel. The subtle elegance of the stand does not compete with the lively decoration of the object it supports, yet it is clear that the brush holder would be far less commanding as a work of art without its custom-designed stand.

Technical Notes

The double vase and the stand are each integrally cast and are exceptionally well cast and finished. The cast decoration and the reign mark on the underside of the vase were finished with cold-working. Metal was sawed away to create the openwork character medallions on the stand. Rubbings taken of the two reign marks on the undersides of the vases do not show an exact correspondence between the marks, although they are very close.

Provenance

Sydney L. Moss Ltd., London, until 1994; Collection of Robert E. Kresko, St. Louis, 1994–2005.

Exhibited

“In the Shadow of Dragons: The Robert Kresko Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes,” The Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas, Texas, March 7–September 9, 2001.

¹ On the symbolism of bats in Chinese art, see Terese Tse Bartholomew, *Hidden Meanings in Chinese Art (Zhongguo jixiang tu'an)* (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum-Chong-Moon Lee Center for Asian Art and Culture, 2006), pp. 22–30, section 1.1.

² On the symbolism of clouds in Chinese art, see *ibid.*, p. 105, section 5.3, and p. 257, section 9.3.

³ Because the *chiwen* is believed to enjoy gazing into distances, it is often depicted with an open mouth on multicolored glazed earthenware tiles placed at either end of the main roof ridge of buildings. See, for instance, an early seventeenth-century tile in the form of a *chiwen*, from Shanxi province, Ming dynasty, Chongzhen period (1628–1644), dated 1631, earthenware with multicolored glaze, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Gift of Joey and Toby Tanenbaum (2000.106.1582), in Klaas Ruitenbeek, “The Gallery of Chinese Architecture,” *Orientations*, vol. 37, no. 3 (April 2006), p. 55, fig. 7.

⁴ In Sanskrit, the Eight Buddhist Emblems are known as *astamangala*. In Tibetan, they are called *bkra shis rtags brgyad*. On the emblems and their Tibetan-style representations, see Robert Beer, *The Encyclopedia of Tibetan Symbols and Motifs* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1999), pp. 171–87 and pls. 81–89. On the Eight Buddhist Emblems in Chinese art, see Bartholomew, *Hidden Meanings in Chinese Art*, p. 185, section 7.18.

⁵ When they first became popular during the Yuan, the Eight Buddhist Emblems were not arranged in any particular order. However, in the Yongle period (1403–1424) of the Ming, they began to be codified in this sequence: wheel, conch, canopy, parasol, lotus, fish, vase, and knot. From the Wanli period (1573–1619) through much of the Qing, the emblems were usually arranged with the positions of the fish and vase reversed. After the Qianlong period, however, the order again ceased to be strictly observed. Outside China, there were other arrangements of these auspicious symbols.

⁶ See, for example, the design of the bats with similarly outstretched wings on the neck, body, and foot of a moon flask with dragons among clouds and bats, Qianlong mark and period, Jingdezhen ware, porcelain with underglaze blue and overglaze polychrome enamel (*doucai* 鬥彩) decoration, Palace Museum, Beijing (*Gu 故* 152092), in Evelyn S. Rawski and Jessica Rawson, eds., *China: The Three Emperors, 1662–1795* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2005), pp. 294–95, cat. no. 217 (illustration), and p. 445, cat. no. 217 (cat. entry by Regina Krah).l).

⁷ One of the best and most vivid examples of pre-Qianlong bat design may be found on an exquisite woman's informal court robe (*changfu* 常服) with design of bat medallions, from the family tomb of Yunli 允禮, Prince Guo 果親王 (1697–1738), half-brother of the Yongzheng emperor and uncle of the Qianlong emperor, Kangxi or Yongzheng period, early eighteenth century, silk satin with silk embroidery, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Anonymous Gift, 1943 (43.119), in Alan Priest, “Prepare for Emperors,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, n.s. vol. 2, no. 1 (Summer 1943), p. 34, fig. 1 (overall view of front of robe), and p. 42, fig. 8 (detail); Lindsay Hughes, “The Kuo Ch'in Wang Textiles,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, ser. 6, vol. 24 (September 1943), p. 133, fig. 6 (overall view of front), and p. 134, fig. 7 (detail of medallion); Jean E. Mailey, “Ancestors and Tomb Robes,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, n.s. vol. 22, no. 3 (November 1963), p. 112, fig. 16 (detail); Jean E. Mailey, *The Manchu Dragon: Costumes of the Ch'ing Dynasty, 1644–1912* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1980), p. 26; and William Watson and Chuimei Ho, *The Arts of China after 1620* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 195, pl. 244.

⁸ See similar cloudbands on a bright yellow emperor's twelve-symbol semiformal court robe (*jifu* 吉服), Qianlong period, silk tapestry with silk brocade borders, Palace Museum, Beijing, in Huang Nengfu and Chen Juanjuan, *Zhongguo long pao (Chinese Imperial Robes)* [Beijing: Zijin cheng chuban she; Guilin: Lijiang chuban she, 2006], pp. 269–71; and those on a full-length but sleeveless court coat (*chaogua* 朝褂) worn by the Empress Dowager Xiaosheng Xian 孝聖憲皇后 (1692–1777) in a court portrait dated 1751, hanging scroll, color on silk, Palace Museum, Beijing (*Gu 故* 6452), in Rawski and Rawson, eds., *China: The Three Emperors*, p. 75, cat. no. 10 (illustration), and pp. 386–87, cat. no. 10 (entry by Jan Stuart).



No. 27

灑金銅弦紋雙鋪獸耳活環大壺

Vase in the Form of an Archaic Wine Vessel with Ring Handles

Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Kangxi period (1662–1722) through Qianlong period (1736–1795), 18th century

Cast bronze with applied gold splashes, with a pigmented wax over induced surface color

height 55.2 cm, diameter of mouth 21.6 cm, diameter of body 30.5 cm

Saint Louis Art Museum, Partial and promised gift of Robert E. Kresko

23:2005

The form of this imposing vase is based on a vessel type whose simple but distinctive silhouette developed during the Warring States period (c.475–221 B.C.) and later became popular during the Western Han (221 B.C.–A.D. 9) and Eastern Han (A.D. 25–220) dynasties. Known as *hu* 壺, these vessels were frequently decorated with horizontal rings around the body and ring handles that were attached to animal or monster heads. The exterior surfaces of archaic examples of such *hu* vessels, which were used for storing wine, sometimes featured incised geometric or stylized decoration of applied mercury amalgams of gold and silver.¹

This attractively archaistic piece is supported on a tall splayed foot, and its globular body is encircled by two wide, grooved bands, rising smoothly to a further band at the point where the shoulder becomes the neck, which flares upward to a raised collar. The uppermost grooved band at the shoulder is superimposed on either side by a well-modeled *taotie* 饕餮 mask with crisply executed eyes and a snout in the form of a loop through which a thick ring handle is suspended. The entire exterior surface of the bronze vessel has been given a honey-brown color and is densely decorated with irregularly shaped gold splashes, which catch and reflect light at numerous points regardless of the direction from which the vase is viewed.

While archaistic *hu* vessels with gilt-splashed decoration are known to have been made in considerable quantities during the late Ming period (first half of the seventeenth century), they tend to be more modest in scale.² Vases as large, or even larger, than the present piece were much more likely to have been made during the eighteenth century, particularly in the Qianlong period, though smaller ones continued to be produced as well.³ During this time, any given form could be made in extremes of scale from the miniature to the monumental; this piece is undoubtedly one of the most impressive examples of its type. Apart from its considerable height and volume, the Kresko vase possesses a certain visual sumptuousness that is synonymous with high Qing decorative style.



Detail of vase, showing ring handle



Side view of vase

Technical Notes

The body of the vase appears to be integrally cast. The masks with half-rings were separately cast and attached, and the handles bent into rings and inserted. Sheet bronze was inserted inside the foot to form the base. The sheet is braced by attached rods in the shape of an X; there is ample spongy solder with white corrosion on the underside. The vase was well finished, but not all casting flaws were completely removed. The gold splashes were thickly applied.

Provenance

Sotheby's London, 1992; Sydney L. Moss Ltd., London, until 2001; Collection of Robert E. Kresko, St. Louis, 2001–2005.

Published

Sotheby's London, *Fine Chinese and Korean Ceramics and Works of Art*, December 8, 1992 (London: Sotheby's, 1992), p. 25, lot no. 32.

Exhibited

"In the Shadow of Dragons: The Robert Kresko Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes," The Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas, Texas, March 7–September 9, 2001.

¹ For a group of variously sized and proportioned Han examples from old Japanese collections, see Umehara Sueji, ed., *Nihon shūcho Shina kodō seika (Nihon Shūcho Shina Kodō Seikwa: Selected Relics of Ancient Chinese Bronzes from Collections in Japan)* (Osaka: Yamanaka shōkai, 1959–1964), vol. 6, pls. 457–62. For a well-known Han example in the Lucy Maud Buckingham Collection, The Art Institute of Chicago (1927.315), see Charles Fabens Kelley and Ch'en Meng-chia, *Chinese Bronzes from the Buckingham*

Collection (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1946), pp. 122–23 and pl. 72; and *Masterpieces of Asian Art in American Collections II: An Offering of Treasures Celebrating the Tenth Anniversary of Asia House Gallery* (New York: The Asia Society, Inc., 1970), pp. 70–71, cat. no. 25. Another good example, in the Musée Cernuschi, Paris, is illustrated in Christian Deydier, *Chinese Bronzes*, translated by Janet Seligman (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1980), p. 118, no. 85.

² For a late Ming or possibly early Qing example with a six-character Xuande mark, correctly proportioned but measuring only 15.3 cm in height, see Gerard Tsang and Hugh Moss, *Arts from the Scholar's Studio: Catalogue of an Exhibition Presented by the Oriental Ceramic Society of Hong Kong and the Fung Ping Shan Museum, University of Hong Kong, 24 October to 13 December 1986* (Hong Kong: The Oriental Ceramic Society of Hong Kong, 1986), pp. 184–85, no. 160.

³ For a medium-sized Qing archaistic gold-splashed *hu*, see Sotheby's New York, *Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art*, Sale 6430, June 1–2, 1993, lot no. 436.

No. 28

雙沖耳三乳足鼎式灑金銅連座香爐

Tripod Censer with Loop Handles and Matching Stand

Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Kangxi period (1662–1722) through Qianlong period (1736–1795), 18th century

Cast bronze with applied gold splashes, with an induced patina and a tinted coating

height with stand 14.8 cm, width across handles 16 cm, depth 15.5 cm, diameter of mouth 14.6 cm

Saint Louis Art Museum, Partial and promised gift of Robert E. Kresko

10:2005a,b





View of apocryphal reign mark on base of censer's body

This censer has a low, compressed body whose bombé shape rises to a slightly everted rim flanked by loop handles on either side. The body is supported on three low, nipple-shaped feet, and the underside of the base has a countersunk rectangular cartouche with a six-character apocryphal reign mark reading *Da Ming Xuande nian zhi* 大明宣德年製 (“Made in the Xuande era of the Great Ming”). The object is set on a matching stand with three elegantly bracketed trefoil feet. The stand, which takes the form of a stylized mallow flower with overlapping petals and a hemispherical knob at the center, has a sculptural quality of its own. The exterior surfaces of both the censer and the stand are decorated with relatively small but differently shaped and sized gold splashes. The interior of the censer is undecorated, but the base of the stand is embellished by a small number of fine gold splashes.

The form of this censer is probably the most classic among bronzes produced during the Xuande 宣德 period (1426–1435) of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), which as a whole rank among the most highly regarded achievements of the Ming. In 1428, the Xuande emperor (1398–1435; r. 1426–1435) instructed the Ministry of Works to cast ritual and religious bronze vessels with copper that had been presented as tribute by the kingdom of Siam.¹ Some of the vessel forms were taken directly from those found in the *Xuanhe bogu tu* 《宣和博古圖》 (Illustrations of Antiquities in the Xuanhe Hall) and other antiquarian texts, while others were modeled on fine specimens of ceramics of the Northern Song (960–1127) and Southern Song (1127–1279) dynasties in the imperial collection.² All in all, there were 117 types of bronzes produced with some 20,000 vessels made in three major casting campaigns. Large numbers of vessels were designated for use in the sacrificial altars located outside the capital, at the imperial ancestral temple, and within the palace itself. In addition, many of these vessels were presented to princely households and meritorious officials.



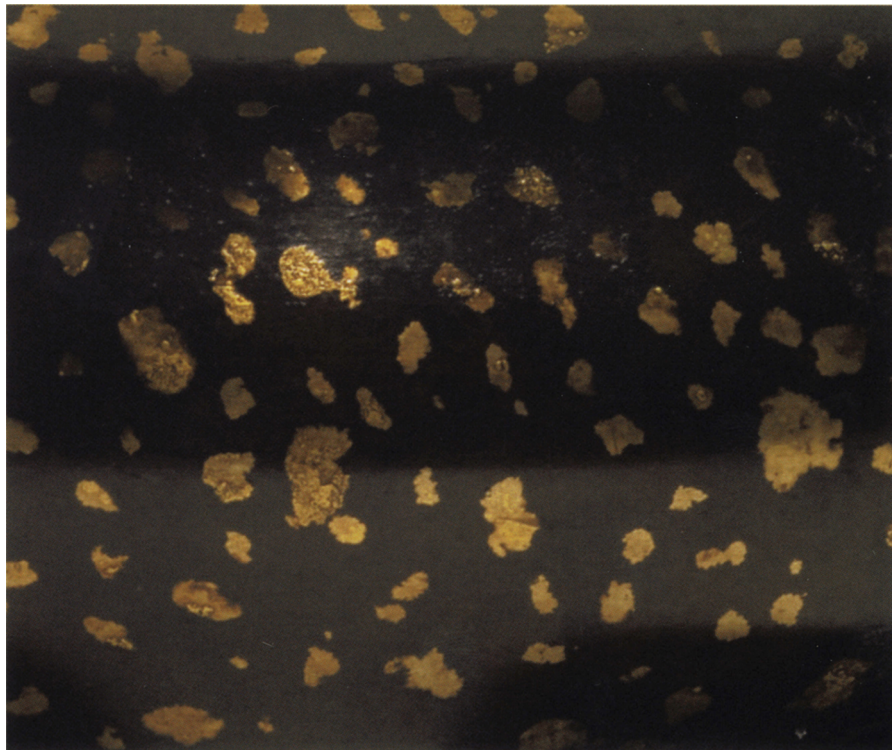
View of the censer's matching stand

Of the 117 vessel types made, censers were the most numerous. The term *Xuande lu* 宣德爐 (“Xuande censers”) thus became a typological reference. Censers made for the purpose of ritual or worship at altars were later used by members of the literati class to decorate the tables and shelves in their studios and to burn fragrant incense for pure enjoyment. The extremely high quality of genuine Xuande bronzes was reputed to derive from bronze that was smelt at least six times and up to twelve times; it is said that the color of the bronze may appear dim at first glance but radiant when closely observed. Authentic Xuande reign marks contain characters that are distinct, complete, and smooth, and the background of such marks have the same color and luster as the vessel itself; this is not the case with the mark on the Kresko piece.

The popularity of Xuande censers led to widespread reproductions during subsequent periods in the Ming and throughout much of the Qing dynasty. The quality of later copies ranges widely, but among the best works it can be extremely difficult to distinguish vessels of the actual Xuande period from those with apocryphal Xuande marks. The ubiquitous use of Xuande marks was partly motivated by a wish to honor an esteemed period, but the high monetary values associated with genuine pieces during the later Ming and certainly during the Qing were equally responsible for the proliferation of apocryphal Xuande works of art.³

Countless “Xuande censers” continued to be made after the fifteenth century, and many of them succeeded in preserving the prototypical characteristics to a high degree. The study of later Chinese bronzes has advanced to a stage where scholars can be more confident in assigning later dates to so-called Xuande censers; this is remarkable considering that this was not the case a decade or two ago.⁴ An important example in the study of this type and form of object is a late seventeenth- or early eighteenth-century brass censer in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. It is undecorated, with a flat base, solid feet, and a six-character Kangxi reign mark (*Da Qing Kangxi nian zhi* 大清康熙年製) on the underside.⁵ Since Kangxi marks are rare on censers of this type, it serves as a yardstick for late seventeenth- or early eighteenth-century iterations of this popular vessel shape.

The fine scattering of gold, which is variously described as having “dots,” “raindrops,” or snowflakes” in gold decorative patterns, over the surface of the Kresko bronze censer and its matching stand are in accord with the ornamentation of the fifteenth century. However, the fine matching stand in floral form, the technically superb casting of the vessel, and the elegant economy of line and metal indicate an eighteenth-century date of manufacture.



Detail of censer's body showing gold decorative patterns

Technical Notes

The censer and stand are well cast and finished. The gold splashes are thickly applied and cover the entire exterior, including the underside of the stand. The reign mark is cast, with no subsequent cold-working to remove extraneous bits of metal or to smooth the surface of the background.

Provenance

Sydney L. Moss Ltd., London, until 2001; Collection of Robert E. Kresko, St. Louis, 2001–2005.

Exhibited

“In the Shadow of Dragons: The Robert Kresko Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes,” The Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas, Texas, March 7–September 9, 2001.

¹ This account may be found in the *Xuande dingyi pu* 《宣德鼎彝譜》 (Catalogue of Ritual Vessels from the Xuande Era) compiled by Lü Zhen 呂震 (1365–1426) et al. For modern reprint editions of this work, see Lü Zhen et al., *Xuande dingyi pu* (8 juan), reprinted with three other titles (Taipei: Guangwen shuju youxian gongsi, 1983); and in a compendium of reprints titled *Xuande yiqi tupu* (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian chubanshe, 2006), pp. 285–444.

² The *Xuanhe bogu tu* in 30 juan was commissioned by Emperor Huizong 徽宗 (1082–1135; r. 1101–1125) and compiled by Wang Fu 王黼 (1079–1126) between 1107 and 1123 during the Northern Song dynasty.

³ Interestingly, a parallel phenomenon exists in the case of Chinese cloisonné enamel wares, large numbers of which bear apocryphal marks of the Jingtai 景泰 period (1450–1457), another very short Ming reign era, so much so that the material and technique have come to be known as *Jingtai lan* 景泰藍 or “blue of Jingtai.” Even so, the connoisseurship of Ming and Qing cloisonné enamel works of art is not nearly as difficult or complex as that of later Chinese bronzes.

⁴ The National Palace Museum, Taipei, has a number of bronze censers with apocryphal Xuande marks that were only recently subjected to more precise dating, as in the case of a sixteenth- or seventeenth-century Xuande-type censer with loop handles and a six-character Xuande mark, bronze with gilding (*Gu tong* 故銅 02495), in Guoli gugong bowu yuan (National Palace Museum), *Gu se: Shiliu zhi shiba shiji yishu de fanggu feng* (*Through the Prism of the Past: Antiquarian Trends in Chinese Art of the 16th to 18th Century*) [Taipei: Guoli gugong bowu yuan (National Palace Museum), 2003], p. 157, cat. no. III-22 (illustrations and captions), and p. 248, cat. no. III-22 (cat. entry). The same museum also possesses a late Ming, early seventeenth-century censer with raised handles and stubby feet, with a six-character Xuande mark on the base, bronze with gilding (*Gu tong* 故銅 02494), in *ibid.*, p. 82, cat. no. I-58 (illustrations and captions), and p. 231, cat. no. I-58 (cat. entry).

⁵ Brooks Bequest (M.1171–1926), in Rose Kerr, “A Preliminary Note on Some Qing Bronze Types,” *Oriental Art*, n.s. vol. 26, no. 4 (Winter 1980–1981), p. 449, figs. 2a and 2b; and Rose Kerr, *Later Chinese Bronzes* (London: Bamboo Publishing Ltd., in association with London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1990), p. 37, pl. 25 (right).



No. 29

局部鑲金銅蟠龍戲珠長頸瓶

Vase with Relief Decoration of Coiled Dragon Chasing a Pearl

Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Kangxi period (1662–1722) through Qianlong period (1736–1795), 18th century

Cast bronze with cast and cold-worked decoration, with induced patina and gilding

height 22.5 cm, diameter 10.2 cm

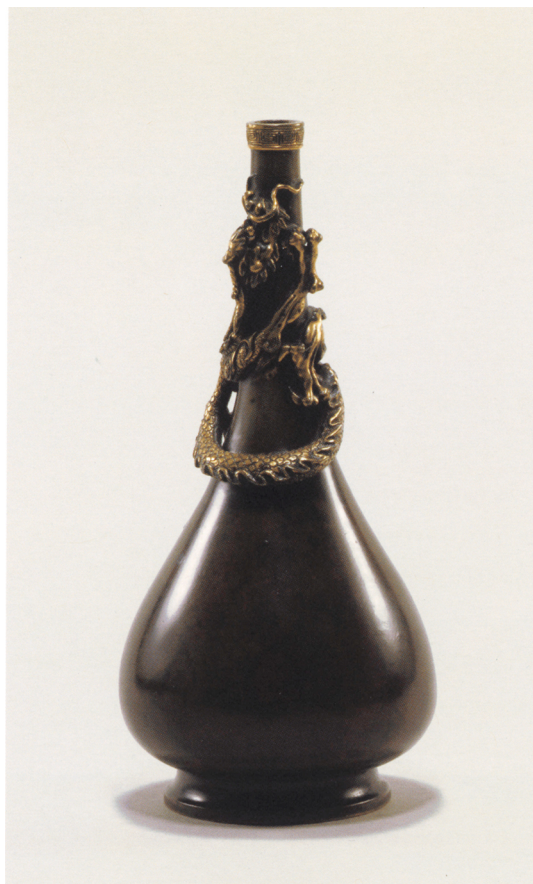
Saint Louis Art Museum, Partial and promised gift of Robert E. Kresko

19:2005

Supported on a low, flared circular foot, this bottle vase has an elegant pear-shaped body, sloping shoulder, and tall, slender, cylindrical neck tapering to a slightly raised rim with a single band of key-fret decoration. The neck is decorated in high relief with a coiled dragon chasing a pearl. The dragon is lean and energetic, with very refined proportions throughout. An incised design of a double *vajra* amidst clouds and ribbons appears on the base; it is superimposed with a *taiji* 太極 symbol at the center. All the areas of decoration on the neck, rim, and base are superbly gilded. The richly mottled dark patina on the undecorated surfaces of the vase recalls the lustrous glazes found on the best early Qing porcelains. The sensual shape of the vase itself is directly modeled on porcelains of the Kangxi period (1662–1722) and most frequently appears in bottle vases with monochrome glazes (such as blanc-de-Chine, mirror-black, and especially the red *sang-de-bœuf* or Langyao 郎窯 variety).¹

The use of coiling dragons modeled in high relief around the necks and shoulders of vases was already well in place by the Tang dynasty (618–907) and may be found on numerous bronzes and ceramic pieces with celadon and *qingbai* 青白 glazes of the Song (960–1279).² It regained popularity during the late Ming and early Qing, especially in Dehua 德化 (“blanc de Chine”) ware from Fujian as well as in jades and Jingdezhen porcelains of the Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong periods.³ This technique applies asymmetrical forms onto otherwise regular vessel shapes, creating a dynamic visual effect. The decorative style was also extended to certain Ming and Qing cloisonné enameled wares and bronzes whose forms were derived from ceramic prototypes.⁴

The most unexpected and very unusual feature of this vase is its inset base bearing an incised double *vajra*, a Tantric motif found in Tibetan Buddhism.⁵ It is the attribute associated with Amoghasiddhi, one of the Five Dhyani Buddhas. While the single *vajra* refers to a thunderbolt that destroys but is itself indestructible, the double *vajra* symbolizes the balance of the four elements and harmony of the four directions, bringing strength and good fortune. In the form of a three-dimensional ritual implement, the double *vajra* may be placed at each of the four corners of a Buddhist altar, as it has been noted, “symbolizing the three mysteries—act, word, and thought—that are understood in the four directions.”⁶



Rear view of vase



View of motif of double *vajra* and *taiji* symbol on base of vase.

Tibetan Buddhism had been influential on imperial decorative arts of the Yuan and certain periods of the Ming, especially porcelains and cloisonné enameled wares.⁷ It continued to be so during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries given the Manchu court's sustained patronage of the lamaistic form of Buddhism. In ceramics, this influence is most visible in blue-and-white wares of the Yongzheng and Qianlong periods, during which time this porcelain-inspired bronze vase was probably made.⁸

Most double *vajra* motifs in decorative contexts have a central medallion with a stylized wave design; a *taiji* symbol at the center is somewhat less common. In either case, the motif appears on Yuan works of art and architecture.⁹ In this vase, the joint presence of the double *vajra* of Buddhism and the *taiji* symbol of Daoism suggests that the object may have been used for some kind of syncretic religious ritual. Alternatively, it may have been commissioned by, or presented to, a person of Mongolian heritage, for whom the evocation of an imperially sanctioned Yuan motif of old may have carried some kind of spiritual resonance.¹⁰

Technical Notes

The coiled dragon was integrally cast with the vase, although one whisker was apparently secured with a pin, which is visible on the interior of the neck. Details on the dragon and the double *vajra* on the base were subsequently added with cold-working techniques. The base may have been inset separately, but this has not been confirmed.

Provenance

The Oriental Art Gallery Limited, London, until 1993; Collection of Robert E. Kresko, St. Louis, 1993–2005.

Published

The Oriental Art Gallery Limited, *Oriental Works of Art: Opening Tuesday, 8th June 1993* (London: The Oriental Art Gallery Limited, 1993), cat. no. 123; Caren Myers, “Report from London,” *Oriental Art*, vol. 39, no. 3 (Autumn 1993), p. 69, fig. 9.

Exhibited

“In the Shadow of Dragons: The Robert Kresko Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes,” The Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas, Texas, March 7–September 9, 2001.

¹ The key-fret pattern is often found on or just below the lips or rims of bottle vases from the Kangxi period.

² See two garlic-headed vases with dragons in the Museo d'Arte Cinese ed Etnografico, Parma, Italy: Tang (bronze); and Song (bronze with gilding), in Giuseppe M. Toscano, *Arte e cultura cinese* (Parma, Italy: Artegrafica Silva, 1984), p. 41, fig. 38, and p. 49, fig. 50.

³ See a vase with dragonet, Ming or Qing, sixteenth to seventeenth century, Dehua ware, porcelain with sculpted and applied decoration and white glaze, Asian Art Museum of San Francisco (B60 P1323), in He Li, *Chinese Ceramics: A New Comprehensive Guide from the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1996), p. 311, no. 684 (illustration), and p. 331, no. 684 (descriptive text); and a vase with appliquéd dragon, Qing, Qianlong period, dated 1740, Jingdezhen ware, porcelain with white glaze and overglaze polychrome enamel decoration, Yale University Art Gallery (1952.52.32), in George J. Lee, *Selected Far Eastern Art in the Yale University Art Gallery* (New Haven and London: Published for the Yale University Art Gallery by Yale University Press, 1970), p. 33, cat. no. 51.

⁴ See two late Ming cloisonné works in the Palace Museum, Beijing: garlic-headed vase with interlaced hydra and decorated with lotuses supporting the Eight Buddhist Emblems, and a vase with *kui*-dragon design and two inlaid hydra, both in Li Jiufang, ed., *Jinshu tai falang qi (Metal-Bodied Enamel Ware)* [Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshu guan (Xianggang) youxian gongsi (The Commercial Press (Hong Kong) Ltd.), 2002], p. 58, no. 56, and p. 62, no. 60; and two garlic-headed vases with coiled dragon decoration in the Victoria and Albert Museum, sixteenth to seventeenth century, respectively bronze and parcel-gilt bronze (M.167–1967 and

88–1876), in Rose Kerr, *Later Chinese Bronzes* (London: Bamboo Publishing Ltd., in association with London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1990), p. 42, pl. 29.

⁵ The double *vajra* is known in Sanskrit as *viśvavajra*; in Tibetan as *rdo rje rgya gram*; and in Chinese as *shuang jin'gang chu* 雙金剛杵.

⁶ Fang Jing Pei, *Symbols and Rebuses in Chinese Art: Figures, Bugs, Beasts, and Flowers* (Berkeley, Calif. and Toronto: Ten Speed Press, 2004), p. 188.

⁷ For a double *vajra* in the center of a Ming blue-and-white porcelain saucer dish from the Chenghua period (1465–1487) in the British Museum, London, see Jessica Harrison-Hall, *Catalogue of Late Yuan and Ming Ceramics in the British Museum* (London: The British Museum Press, 2001), pp. 166–67, cat. no. 6.10. For a double *vajra* on the base of an early sixteenth-century Ming three-footed, chrysanthemum-decorated cloisonné enamel dish, see Helmut Brinker and Albert Lutz, *Chinese Cloisonné: The Pierre Uldry Collection*, translated from the German by Susanna Swoboda (New York: The Asia Society Galleries, in association with London: Bamboo Publishing Ltd., 1989), cat. no. 73.

⁸ See an eighteenth-century shallow bowl in the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco with a Yongzheng mark and period, Jingdezhen ware, porcelain with underglaze blue decoration, Gift of Arthur Leeper (B87 P12), in He, *Chinese Ceramics*, p. 290, pl. 591 (illustration), and pp. 320–21, pl. 591 (descriptive text).

⁹ One of the most significant examples of the double *vajra* and *taiji* symbol combination is found on a carved white marble panel near the base of the Cloud Terrace (Yun tai 雲臺), a ceremonial portal at the strategic Juyong Pass (Juyong guan 居庸關) some fifty kilometers north of Beijing, which was built in 1345 by command of the last Mongol ruler in China, Emperor Huizong 惠宗 (Borjigin Toghan-Temür, 1320–1370; reigned as Ukhaatu Khan); see James C. Y. Watt and Denise Patry Leidy, *Defining Yongle: Imperial Art in Early Fifteenth-Century China* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 19, fig. 5.

¹⁰ For illustrations of the double *vajra* and the *taiji* symbol in a Tibetan context, see Robert Beer, *The Encyclopedia of Tibetan Symbols and Motifs* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1999), pp. 238–43 and pp. 110–12, and pp. 358–61 and pl. 160.



No. 30

銅嵌彩石太平有象擺件一對

Pair of Vessels, Each in the Form of an Elephant Carrying a Vase

Qing dynasty (1644–1911), 18th century

Cast bronze with a tinted coating, and stones

one height 16.8 cm, width 13.8 cm, depth 8.7 cm, the other height 17.1 cm, width 13.5 cm, depth 7.4 cm

Collection of Robert E. Kresko

This matched set of bronze vessels takes the form of a pair of festooned elephants standing foursquare, one with its head turned to the left and the other with its head turned to the right, both with trunks curled upward and leaflike ears. The tails swing to the same side as the respective head. Each animal's body is draped with a richly decorated caparison and an elaborately shaped saddle blanket. The back of each elephant is surmounted by a flaring beaker vase whose central portion has animal heads protruding from opposite ends and intricate chains of beads in between; the upper part of each vase is adorned with delicate scrolling lotuses cast in relief. The head and body of each elephant and the vase above are inset with colored stones. There is some rubbing of high points on the objects.

Vessels in the form of elephants carrying vases were produced in considerable numbers during the late seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. They were usually made in pairs, and they could vary in size from very small to quite large. The smaller ones often functioned as decoration for the scholar's studio or as candleholders, while the larger ones could be used as part of five-piece altar garnitures (comprising a censer, a pair of candleholders, and a pair of flower vases).¹ In addition, numerous examples of such vessels may be found in other materials such as jade, porcelain, and cloisonné enamel, or combinations thereof.²

Elephants were known to exist in the Yellow River basin in northern China in antiquity, but by late imperial times they were scarce and could be found only in the far southwest, in Yunnan province.³ Elephants were often presented by southern states as tributary gifts to the Manchu court. They served as highly visible symbols of strength, and during Qing imperial processions they would often carry vases on their backs to connote the prowess of the ruling house. From a religious standpoint, the animals are also associated with Śākyamuni Buddha, whose conception was believed to be the result of a small white elephant entering the womb of his mother, Queen Maya. According to legend, the Buddha descends from Heaven to Earth on an elephant. In Buddhist iconography, the elephant carries the Buddha's alms bowl and the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra (Puxian pusa 普賢菩薩) has an elephant as his mount.



Rear view of elephant vessels

The popularity of this type of vessel has much to do with the fact that in Ming and Qing culture, an elephant carrying a vase on its back served as a rebus or visual pun with the embedded auspicious meaning “when there is peace at large, there will be signs” (*tai ping you xiang* 太平有象), since the Chinese characters for “peace” (*ping* 平) and “vase” (*ping* 瓶) are exact homonyms, while the characters for “elephant” (*xiang* 象) and “auspiciousness” (*xiang* 祥) are near homonyms that have only a minor tonal difference. It was believed that when peace prevailed, there would be bumper harvests of the Five Sacred Crops (soybeans, rice, wheat, barley, and millet).⁴ Thus, the multiple meanings embodied by such decorative objects in the form of elephants carrying vases lent themselves to widespread production and collection.

Recently, a parcel-gilt vessel whose design is nearly identical to one of the present pair emerged from a Japanese private collection onto the art market in Hong Kong. Measuring 18 cm in height and undoubtedly once part of a pair, it is only a little larger than the vessels under discussion. Its golden brown surface is decorated with irregular gold splashes, creating an effect that is quite different from the Kresko pair.⁵

Technical Notes

The two vessels are mirror images of one another but not identical in every detail. Each was cast in two sections, the animal and the vase, and joined together. The details of the decoration appear to be cast. The bottoms of the feet have core material visible and were patched with white metal. Some of the inset colored stones have holes at their centers, suggesting that they are beads.

Provenance

The Oriental Art Gallery Limited, London, by 1994; Sotheby's New York, 1995.

Published

The Oriental Art Gallery Limited, *Oriental Jewellery and Works of Art: Opening Tuesday, 6th December 1994* (London: The Oriental Art Gallery Limited, 1994), cat. no. 137; Sotheby's New York, *Fine Chinese Ceramics, Furniture and Works of Art*, Sale 6739, September 23, 1995, lot no. 330.

Exhibited

"In the Shadow of Dragons: The Robert Kresko Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes," The Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas, Texas, March 7–September 9, 2001.

¹ For a late Qing, nineteenth-century five-piece elephant altar garniture in cloisonné enamel, see Christie's London, *Chinese Ceramics and Decorative Works of Art*, Sale 3098, May 23, 1985, pp. 72–73, lot no. 219; and the same group in Christie's London, *Fine Chinese Export Porcelain and Works of Art*, Sale 3243, November 11–12, 1985, p. 22, lot no. 65.

² For an elaborate pair of Qianlong-period (1736–1795) elephants carrying vases in the Palace Museum, Beijing, in jade, cloisonné enamel, and sandalwood, see Zhang Hongxing, *The Qianlong Emperor: Treasures from the Forbidden City* (Edinburgh: National Museums of Scotland Publishing Limited, 2002), p. 44, cat. no. 10.

³ For an account of the elephant in high antiquity in China, see Carl W. Bishop, "The Elephant and Its Ivory in Ancient China," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 41, no. 4 (1921), pp. 290–306.

⁴ See Hong Kong Museum of Art, *Qian xiang yun ji: Zhongguo jixiang tu'an wenwu: Minqiu jingshe sishi wu zhounian jinian zhan (Auspicious Emblems: Chinese Cultural Treasures: 45th Anniversary Exhibition of the Min Chiu Society)*, jointly presented by Kangle ji wenhua shiwu shu (Leisure and Cultural Services Department) and Minqiu jingshe (Min Chiu Society), organized by Xianggang yishu guan (Hong Kong Museum of Art) [Hong Kong: Kangle ji wenhua shiwu shu (Leisure and Cultural Services Department), 2005], p. 360, cat. no. 183; and Terese Tse Bartholomew, *Hidden Meanings in Chinese Art (Zhongguo jixiang tu'an)* (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum-Chong-Moon Lee Center for Asian Art and Culture, 2006), pp. 237–38, section 8.12.

⁵ Christie's Hong Kong, *Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art*, Sale 2190, May 30, 2005, p. 96, lot no. 1396. For a much larger pair (each height 44.8 cm), see Christie's New York, *Fine Chinese Furniture, Ceramics, and Works of Art*, Sale 9210, September 16, 1999, p. 141, lot no. 226.



No. 31

銅嵌銀絲寶相花紋長頸瓶

Vase with Compressed Body and Tubular Neck

Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Kangxi period (1662–1722) through Qianlong period (1736–1795),
late 17th–18th century

Cast bronze with silver wire inlay, with pigmented wax over induced patina

height 48.4 cm, diameter of mouth 11.8 cm, diameter of body 34 cm, diameter of base 22.5 cm

Collection of Robert E. Kresko

This large vase has a compressed spherical body tapering into the tall, tubular neck, which broadens a little to the gently everted lip. The flattened body rests on a low, slightly splayed foot. The exterior of the vessel is uniformly decorated with inlaid silver wire designs of stylized flowers, scrolling stems, and leaves.¹ The elaborate flowers, known in Chinese as *baoxiang hua* 寶相花 (sometimes called “Buddha’s rose” in the West), are a combination of peony, lotus, and other flowers. Inspired by Indian Buddhism and first popularized in China during the Sui (581–618) and Tang (618–907) dynasties, the flowers represent majesty and beauty. Because of their auspicious connotations, they are widely used for decoration and patterning in metalwork (especially in gold and silver), stone carving, ceramics, and textiles. Over the centuries, numerous variations of *baoxiang hua* designs were developed, and those found on this vase reflect a style typical of the early Qing dynasty.²

The distinctive shape and proportions of this vase are not related to Chinese bronzes from any earlier period, but there are ancient precedents in Chinese ceramics.³ The designer of the vase was probably inspired by contemporary porcelains of the early Qing.⁴ During the reigns of the Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong emperors, Jingdezhen porcelain vases with compressed bodies and tall cylindrical necks were fairly commonplace.⁵ This was especially the case in monochrome wares, since the combination of a very strong silhouette and an exquisite white or colored glaze would have been sufficient to command attention without any additional decoration. Many such monochrome Qing porcelains have survived, allowing for easy comparison with the Kresko vase.⁶

The decoration of this vase with inlaid silver wire resonates with the technique of cloisonné enamel wares. It is also related, mainly but not exclusively, to a large group of similarly embellished late Ming and early Qing bronzes that typically bear two-character marks reading *Shisou* 石叟.⁷ *Shisou* is an unrecorded figure said to have been active during the Chongzhen period (1628–1644) of the late Ming, but his existence has not been verified.⁸ Although the vase lacks a maker’s mark, the technique and quality of the silver wire inlay naturally lead to an association with earlier works from the *Shisou* workshop.

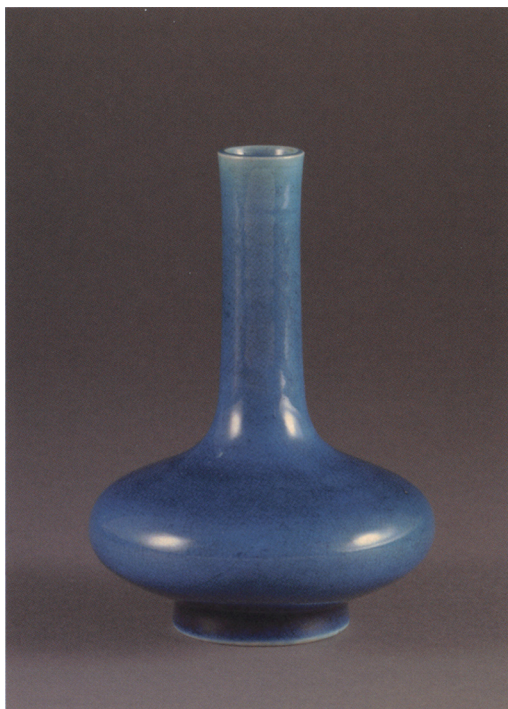


Fig. 8: Miniature vase; Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Qianlong period (1736–1795); Jingdezhen ware; porcelain with turquoise glaze; height 10.8 cm, diameter of mouth 1.9 cm, diameter of body 7.8 cm, diameter of foot 4 cm; Saint Louis Art Museum, Bequest of Samuel C. Davis 1057:1940.

Technical Notes

The vase was integrally cast, with a plate soldered inside the foot to serve as the base. Shallow channels were carved into the surface to receive the silver wire inlay. There are casting flaws on the surface overall; these have been filled with a gray material where visible, while those on the underside of the belly of the vase are crudely repaired.

¹ This decorative technique entails having the designs incised on the bronze vessel, carefully hammering silver wire into the depressions, and polishing the whole to produce a smooth finish. The technique was perfected early on by Korean artists during the Goryeo 高麗 dynasty (918–1392). See, for instance, a well-known twelfth-century bottle from this period in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, bronze inlaid with silver wire, Given by Brooks (M.1189–1926).

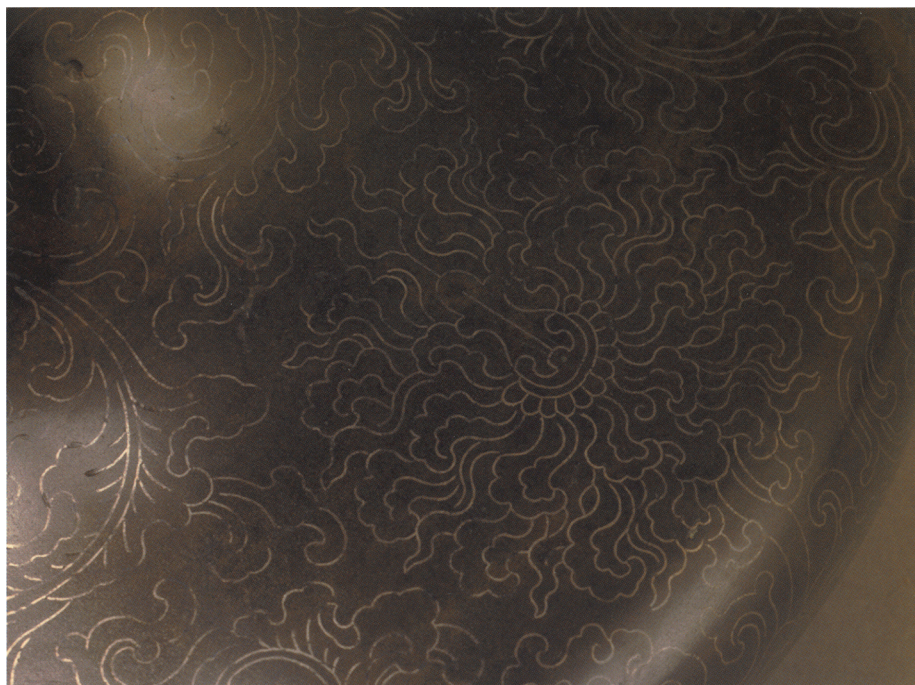
² For the development of flower (especially lotus and *baoxiang hua*) designs on the closely related medium of Chinese cloisonné from the early fifteenth century

through the eighteenth century, see the twelve schematic outline drawings in Helmut Brinker and Albert Lutz, *Chinese Cloisonné: The Pierre Uldry Collection*, translated from the German by Susanna Swoboda (New York: The Asia Society Galleries, in association with London: Bamboo Publishing Ltd., 1989), p. 59, fig. 34a-m. The one that agrees most closely with the flowers on the Kresko vase is the second to last in the group, ascribed to the eighteenth century.

³ One such example is a long-necked bottle thought to date to the Warring States period (c.475–221 B.C.) or the Western Han dynasty (221 B.C.–A.D. 9), fifth to first century B.C., stoneware with ash glaze, private collection, Japan, in *Osaka Exchange Exhibition: Paintings from the Abe Collection and Other Masterpieces of Chinese Art* (Osaka: Osaka Municipal Museum of Fine Arts; San Francisco: San Francisco Center for Asian Art and Culture, 1970), pp. 128–29, pl. 79. Another example is a vase in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Southern Song dynasty, twelfth to thirteenth century, Guan-type Longquan ware, stoneware with pale bluish green glaze, Charles B. Hoyt Collection (50.934), in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, *The Charles B. Hoyt Collection: Memorial Exhibition, February 13–March 30, 1952* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1952), p. 57, cat. no. 226.

⁴ For examples in Chinese glass, see a vase with a compressed spherical body supporting a tall thick-walled cylindrical neck and resting on a low, slightly splayed foot, the reign mark wheel-cut on the underside within a square, Qianlong period, pale green Peking glass, in Sotheby's London, *Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art*, June 12, 1990, pp. 78–79, lot no. 107; a vase with a low compressed body and a tall cylindrical neck, supported on a low splayed square-cut foot, the metal of deep translucent bottle green color, Qianlong period, dark green Peking glass, in Sotheby's Hong Kong, *Fine Chinese Works of Art, Jade Carvings and Jadeite Jewellery*, November 14, 1990, lot no. 433; and an eighteenth-century pair of small glass vases of striated black, white, and gray tones imitating banded agate, in The Oriental Art Gallery Limited, *Oriental Works of Art: Opening Tuesday, 8th June 1993* (London: The Oriental Art Gallery Limited, 1993), cat. no. 120.

⁵ See, for instance, a bottle vase, Kangxi period, porcelain with underglaze blue decoration, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C., Harry G. Steele Collection, Gift of Grace C. Steele (1972.43.9; C-564), in Virginia Bower et al., *Decorative Arts, Part II: Far Eastern Ceramics and Paintings; Persian and Indian Rugs and Carpets* (Washington, D. C.: National Gallery of Art; New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 248.



Detail of silver wire inlay on the vase's body showing *baoxiang hua* designs

⁶ Examples from the Collections Baur, Musée des Arts d'Extrême-Orient, Geneva, Switzerland, all published in John Ayers, *The Baur Collection, Geneva: Chinese Ceramics*, vol. 3, *Monochrome-Glazed Porcelains of the Ch'ing Dynasty* (Geneva: Collections Baur, 1972): bottle with flattened globular body tapering into a cylindrical neck, Kangxi period, porcelain with *sang-de-bœuf* copper-red glaze, (inv. no. 496; cat. no. A 278); bottle with depressed body and tall tubular neck spreading slightly toward the mouth rim, small, straight foot, Kangxi or Yongzheng period, porcelain with black glaze, (inv. no. 524; cat. no. A 386); bottle with flattened globular shape with tubular neck, low foot, and slightly convex base, mouth rim bound in a band of copper, Kangxi or Yongzheng period, porcelain with apple green glaze, (inv. no. 475; cat. no. A 460); bottle with flattened body, the rounded sides tapering into the tall, narrow neck, which broadens somewhat toward the mouth, small foot, and slightly recessed base, Kangxi, Yongzheng, or Qianlong period, eighteenth century, porcelain with crackled deep mustard yellow enamel glaze, (inv. no. 523; cat. no. A 453). Some of the eighteenth-century vases are diminutive but exquisite in form and color, as is the case with a tiny vase in the Saint Louis Art Museum, Qing dynasty, Qianlong period, Jingdezhen ware, porcelain with turquoise glaze, Bequest of Samuel C. Davis (1057:1940); previously unpublished (Fig. 8).

⁷ See, for instance, a *Shisou*-marked vase, with a shape related to, but less dramatic than, the Kresko piece, presented by Sydney L. Moss Ltd., London, as a product of the Qing dynasty between the late seventeenth and nineteenth centuries: "point" bottle flower vase, in Sydney L. Moss Ltd., *The Second Bronze Age: Later Chinese Metalwork*, catalogue by Paul Moss and Gerard Hawthorn (London: Sydney L. Moss Ltd., 1991), cat. no. 63.

⁸ On *Shisou* and related works, see Gerard Tsang and Hugh Moss, *Arts from the Scholar's Studio: Catalogue of an Exhibition Presented by the Oriental Ceramic Society of Hong Kong and the Fung Ping Shan Museum, University of Hong Kong, 24 October to 13 December 1986* (Hong Kong: The Oriental Ceramic Society of Hong Kong, 1986), pp. 178–79, no. 157; Rose Kerr, *Later Chinese Bronzes* (London: Bamboo Publishing Ltd., in association with London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1990), p. 65 and pls. 49–50; and Robert D. Mowry, *China's Renaissance in Bronze: The Robert H. Clague Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes, 1100–1900* (Phoenix, Ariz.: Phoenix Art Museum, 1993), pp. 87–101, cat. nos. 16–18.



No. 32

御製雙環耳夔紋雷紋銅供瓶一對

Pair of Imperial Baluster-Form Temple Vases

Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Yongzheng period (1723–1735), early 18th century
Cast bronze with cast and cold-worked decoration, with a pigmented wax coating
each height 54 cm, width 26.7 cm
Saint Louis Art Museum, Partial and promised gift of Robert E. Kresko
20:2005.1, .2

Physically and visually imposing, these two heavy baluster-form vases are nearly identical to each other, except for minute differences in the stylized squared spiral or *leiwen* 雷紋 (“thunder pattern”) decoration that forms the ground on which much of the archaistic *kui*-dragon (*kui long* 夔龍) and other design elements are superimposed. It is clear that the vases were made at the same time by the same bronze workshop. Each vase is divided into three main visual components: a tall neck with a flaring lip, an egg-shaped body, and a fairly tall splayed foot. Superimposed on either side of the main body are monster-mask escutcheons that support loose ring handles. There are seven distinct registers of decoration, separated by bands of varying widths and terminated at the top by a vertical lip and at the bottom by a vertical foot ring. Another nearly identical vase is in the Robert H. Clague Collection of later Chinese bronzes at the Phoenix Art Museum.¹

Two low-relief characters reading *jing zhi* 敬製 (“respectfully made”) from right to left are found at the top of each of the Kresko vases. The characters are placed within a countersunk rectangle, each in precisely the same position on the vertical lip with respect to the overall decorative scheme immediately below. The placement of these characters gives the vases both centrality and frontality. Inside the foot of each vase is a countersunk rectangle containing a six-character reign mark in relief reading *Da Qing Yongzheng nian zhi* 大清雍正年製 (“Made in the Yongzheng era of the Great Qing”). As Robert D. Mowry points out in the case of an identical reign mark on the vase in the Clague collection, the “six-character mark . . . shows the fully developed Yongzheng style, which is based on characters in woodblock-printed books rather than on the calligraphy of brush-written texts. The mark is identical in style to those on imperial porcelains of the day, confirming the authenticity of the vessel.”²

The two Kresko vases belong to a type made for use in the various Qing palace complexes or for presentation to important temples. They were undoubtedly produced as part of five-piece altar garnitures (*wu gong* 五供), each of which would also feature a large censer (*xianglu* 香爐) and a pair of candleholders (*zhutai* 燭臺) with matching designs.³ Typically, the censer would have been placed at the center of a long altar table, flanked on either side by the candleholders, with the two vases anchoring the far ends of the ensemble. All five



View of imperial mark on the mouth rim of one of the vases



View of reign mark on the interior of the foot of one of the vases

pieces in a complete set would have served practical functions in temple rituals while appearing highly ornamental at the same time (Fig. 9). Judging from size and weight, this pair of vases would have held large stalks of cut flowers that varied by the season.

According to Mowry, presentation vases of this type have a long history that may be better traced through the history of later Chinese ceramics. Among the most impressive and important of all surviving temple vases is a renowned monumental pair in the Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, London. Known as the “David vases” and both dated by dedicatory inscription to 1351, they each have a high foot rim, tall foot, ovoid body, decoration in bands of differing widths, handles in the form of elephant heads and trunks, flaring neck, and vertical lip.⁴

While the form of these bronze altar vases is strongly rooted in porcelain wares, the designs of the *kui*-dragons, cicada lappets, *leiwen* spirals, and other archaistic motifs are clearly derived from ancient bronzes of the late Shang dynasty (c.1600–c.1050 B.C.). However, there is no single source, so that even the archaistic motifs are mixed and matched to create a wholly new combination.

The extremely fine design and casting of the Kresko temple vases reflect the lofty standards maintained at the court of the Yongzheng emperor. His twelve-year reign was a very short one, certainly when compared to the sixty-one-year reign of his father, the Kangxi emperor, and to the sixty-year reign of his son, the Qianlong emperor. As Regina Krahll has noted: “The Yongzheng reign was a period of growth and prosperity. The Emperor was a highly cultured man, committed to his duties, and largely successful in his efforts. His aesthetic sensibility, assertive taste, demanding standards, and intense personal interest in the arts pushed them to unprecedented levels of refinement and sophistication.”⁵ The Yongzheng period is now recognized as truly extraordinary for its overall level of taste and craftsmanship.



Fig. 9: Imperial five-piece garniture; Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Yongzheng period (1723–1735), early 18th century; bronze; height of candlesticks 62.5 cm; The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Gift of funds from Ruth and Bruce Dayton (99.121.1.1A-e). © Christie's Images Ltd.

Technical Notes

The neck, body, and foot of the vases appear to have been integrally cast. There is a line around the interior of each neck, but this seems to be a flashing that resulted from casting, which was filed down when the pieces were finished. Four small recessed cubes can be found equidistant on the interior of each vase at the shoulder; these do not correspond to any exterior feature and are most likely mold registers for casting. The rings and lug handles were cast separately and attached. A separate sheet of metal has been placed inside the foot to serve as the bottom of each vase. A series of parallel lines suggesting a wheel-thrown ceramic is faintly visible on the interior of each foot, which was probably transferred from the mold.

Although casting flaws and repairs are visible on the surfaces overall, the vases are beautifully finished, with precise but minimal cold-working of the cast decorative patterns and motifs.

The six-character reign marks inside the vases' feet were cast and not finished with cold-working; the characters on the lips are sharply finished, although there is an absence of tool marks in the cartouches.

Provenance

Sydney L. Moss Ltd., London, until 1994; Collection of Robert E. Kresko, St. Louis, 1994–2005.

Exhibited

"In the Shadow of Dragons: The Robert Kresko Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes," The Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas, Texas, March 7–September 9, 2001.

¹ For the Clague vase, see Christie's London, *Fine Chinese Export Porcelain and Works of Art*, Sale 4394, October 29, 1990, p. 61, lot no. 98; Sydney L. Moss Ltd., *The Second Bronze Age: Later Chinese Metalwork*, catalogue by Paul Moss and Gerard

Hawthorn (London: Sydney L. Moss Ltd., 1991), cat. no. 68; and Robert D. Mowry, *China's Renaissance in Bronze: The Robert H. Clague Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes, 1100–1900* (Phoenix, Ariz.: Phoenix Art Museum, 1993), pp. 177–79, cat. no. 37 (for notes, see p. 248).

² Mowry, *China's Renaissance in Bronze*, p. 177–78, cat. no. 37.

³ An extremely rare and complete set of identical design, which had been acquired in Beijing around 1900, appeared on the art market several years ago. See Christie's Hong Kong, *The Imperial Sale & Fine Chinese Works of Art*, Sale 8008, April 26, 1999 (Hong Kong: Christie's Hong Kong Limited, 1999), lot no. 522; this set of vessels is now in the collection of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. In addition to a pair of baluster-form vases like the ones here, this imperial garniture has a strap-handled tripod censer with a fan-shaped attachment and two pricket candlesticks. The candlesticks are the tallest objects in the set, each measuring 62.5 cm in height.

⁴ Pair of temple vases, Yuan dynasty, fourteenth century, Jingdezhen ware, porcelain with underglaze cobalt blue decoration, Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, London (PDF B614), in Sheila Riddell, *Dated Chinese Antiquities, 600–1650* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber Limited, 1979), p. 85, pl. 62; and Los Angeles County Museum of Art, *Imperial Taste: Chinese Ceramics from the Percival David Foundation* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books; Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; London: Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, 1989), pp. 54–5, cat. no. 27.

⁵ Regina Krah, "The Yongzheng Emperor: Art Collector and Patron," in Evelyn S. Rawski and Jessica Rawson, eds., *China: The Three Emperors, 1662–1795* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2005), p. 245.



No. 33

三神獸紋牛首紋三足圓底銅罐

*Tripod Jar with Bovine-Head Handles and
Relief Decoration of Mythical Animals*

Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Yongzheng period (1723–1735) or

Qianlong period (1736–1795), second or third quarter of the 18th century

Cast bronze with cast and cold-worked decoration, and a pigmented wax over an induced patina

height 25.4 cm, width 21.6 cm, depth 24 cm

Saint Louis Art Museum, Partial and promised gift of Robert E. Kresko

21:2005

This elegant ovoid-bodied vessel, with high shoulders, short-waisted neck, and rolled lip, rests on three short cabriole legs. The outward aspect and upper part of each leg is decorated with the head of a two-horned bovine on a ground of decorative patterns within a scalloped medallion. On the shoulder are three small lug handles, the upper portion of each decorated with a bovine head that is characterized by a long narrow face and horns that curve inward and backward. At the widest point of the vessel are three mythical beasts cast in medium relief between the lug handles; each one of them is also placed directly above one of the jar's three legs. Two of the animals' bodies are oriented to the viewer's left while the remaining animal's body faces the viewer's right. This arrangement was probably not left to chance, for when the vessel is regarded from the rear aspect, the beasts that would be visible on either side have their bodies oriented toward the center, which makes the visual composition appear more balanced than if they both faced one direction or the other. There is a counter-sunk rectangle (aligned with the axis of the front leg) on the rounded bottom of the vessel, within which is a six-character apocryphal reign mark reading *Da Ming Xuande nian zhi* 大明宣德年製 ("Made in the Xuande era of the Great Ming"). The induced patina, with its coating of pigmented wax, produces a mottled, dark brown appearance over all the visible exterior surfaces including the underside of the vessel and part of the interior near the mouth.

It is noteworthy that the bovine motif, which may represent either an ox or a water buffalo, appears in the lug handles as well as the feet of the jar. Traditionally the principal beasts of burden in southern China, the ox (*niu* 牛) and the water buffalo (*shuiniu* 水牛) were indispensable to agriculture, especially rice cultivation, for centuries. These animals also have important places in Chinese cultural history. The ox is the second of twelve animals in the Chinese zodiac; it serves as a symbol of fortitude and hard work. According to legend, the sixth-century B.C. philosophical sage Laozi departed the political chaos of China for the Western Regions by riding an ox or a water buffalo through the Hangu Pass, shortly after leaving behind a brief but profound text that later become canonized as the *Daode jing* 《道德經》 (Classic of the Way and Its Virtue).¹



View of apocryphal reign mark on base of the jar's body

The three mythical beasts rendered in relief all have several features in common: single horn, pointed ears, flowing mane, lumpy body, bushy tail, and feet with long, fingerlike digits and claws. However, each also has a distinctive physiognomical aspect that sets it apart from the others. The upwardly gazing creature over the front foot of the vessel has a rounded snout, a short beard, and tufts of hair behind its forelegs and hind legs. It may be a representation of the so-called Beast of the White Marsh (*baize* 白澤).² As for the other two animals, the one with horizontal scales on its chest and a raised

foreleg may be identified as the legendary *xiezhi* 獬豸, which is said to be able to judge good and evil.³ For this reason, the *xiezhi* was chosen to be the insignia on rank badges of censors (*yu shi* 御使) in late imperial China.⁴ The remaining beast has an elongated snout like an elephant's; it has yet to be identified, for there is no comparable animal in classic illustrated works such as the *Shanhai jing* 《山海經》 (Classic of Mountains and Seas) and the *San cai tu hui* 《三才圖會》 (Collected Illustrations of the Three Realms). It should be noted that the representational style of these three animals is very closely related to that of the four beasts found on the large quatrefoil-lobed vase with gold-splashed decoration in the Kresko collection (No. 21).

The form of this vase's body is derived from ceramics, in particular the shape of Tang-dynasty lead-glazed ovoid jars known as *wannian guan* 萬年罐 ("jar of myriad years," characterized by ovoid body, high shoulders, short neck, everted mouth with rolled lip, but with a flat base), such as one example in the Saint Louis Art Museum.⁵ A revival of this ceramic form occurred in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries during the Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong reigns; the predominance of monochrome glazes on these porcelains probably provided the immediate inspiration for the production of bronze versions with smooth, shiny surfaces that mimicked lustrous glazes.⁶

The simple lines that form the body of the Kresko vessel are counterbalanced by the detail in the three cabriole feet, the three lug handles on the shoulder, and the three relief mythological animals at the upper-body level. The vase's visual elegance is due in part to the fact that the base is rounded like one end of an egg, and in part because the vessel is sufficiently raised so that a sense of lightness mitigates the otherwise top-heavy form.

Technical Notes

This heavy vase was integrally cast and the exterior nicely finished, with well-executed repairs of casting flaws. Cold-working was used to add decorative details to the cast animal figures, handles, and feet, and to finish the reign mark on the underside of the vessel.

Provenance

Sydney L. Moss Ltd., London, until 1992; Collection of Robert E. Kresko, St. Louis, 1992–2005.

Exhibited

"In the Shadow of Dragons: The Robert Kresko Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes," The Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas, Texas, March 7–September 9, 2001.

¹ Among well-known images of Laozi riding a water buffalo or ox is a painting by Zhang Lu (c.1490–1563), *Laozi on an Ox*, Ming dynasty, early to mid-sixteenth century, hanging scroll, ink on paper, National Palace Museum, Taipei, in Stephen L. Little with Shawn Eichman, *Taoism and the Arts of China* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, in association with Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 116–17, cat. no. 2.

² On the *baize*, see the *Niaoshou* 鳥獸 ("Birds and Beasts") section, *juan* 4, folio 5a, of Wang Qi and Wang Siyi, comps., *San cai tu hui* (106 *juan*), completed 1607, first published 1609; reprint ed. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1988), vol. 3, p. 2235, and Schuyler V. R. Cammann, "Some Strange Ming Beasts," *Oriental Art*, n.s. vol. 2, no. 3 (Autumn 1956), pp. 101–102 and fig. 8.

³For a late Ming illustration and description of the *xiezhi*, see Wang and Wang, comps., *San cai tu hui*, *Niaoshou* ("Birds and Beasts") section, *juan* 3, folio 4a-b, reprint ed. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1988), vol. 3, p. 2202.

⁴See Ray Huang, 1587, *A Year of No Significance: The Ming Dynasty in Decline* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 53–4.

⁵ Grain jar, Tang dynasty (618–907), earthenware with three-color (*sancái*) lead glaze, Saint Louis Art Museum, Museum Purchase (4:1927). This vessel form was utilized by a number of Tang kilns, including those in Huangdao 黃道, Jia 郊 county, Henan province that produced glazed stoneware known as Huangdao ware. See a jar with two lug handles in the Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst/Gegenwartskunst (Austrian Museum of Applied Arts/Contemporary Art), Vienna, Tang dynasty, late seventh to eighth century, Huangdao ware, white stoneware with dark blue slipped glaze (inv. no. 31290, Ke 08448, Samml. Exner), listed in Herbert Fux, ed., *4000 Jahre ostasiatische Kunst* (Krems an der Donau, Austria: Stadt Krems a. d. Donau, Kulturverwaltung, 1978), p. 98, cat. no. 137.

⁶ See, for instance, a porcelain jar with flambé red glaze in the Victoria and Albert Museum, Qianlong mark and period, Salting Bequest (C. 407–1910), in John Ayers, *Far Eastern Ceramics in the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London: Philip Wilson Publishers Ltd, in association with London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1980), monochrome pl. 218; another Qianlong porcelain jar also with flambé glaze, in Sotheby's New York, *Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art*, Sale 5949, December 6, 1989, lot no. 181; and a Ru-type jar formerly in the collection of T. Y. Chao of Hong Kong, Qianlong mark and period, porcelain with pale blue glaze, in Sotheby's Hong Kong, *Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art*, May 15, 1990, lot no. 82.



Detail of jar showing tripod feet



No. 34

甬端形銅香爐

Covered Censer in the Form of a Mythical Auspicious Animal

Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Yongzheng period (1723–1735) or Qianlong period (1736–1795),
mid- to late 18th century

Cast bronze with cast decoration, with induced surface color and remnants of a tinted wax coating
height 17.1 cm, width 12.1 cm

Saint Louis Art Museum, Partial and promised gift of Robert E. Kresko

9:2005a,b

This censer takes the form of a mythical animal holding a serpent under its feet. The beast stands foursquare over the writhing reptile, whose head sweeps up behind the right hind leg and whose tail curls up the left hind leg. The beast's stout body is mostly covered by an armorlike outer skin decorated with a combination of flames, whorls, and scroll patterns in low relief. Its chest, defined by a central column of horizontal scales, is embellished by a bell and a pair of flanking tassels, all suspended from a neckband. The tail is made up of short and long curling strands emerging from under the protective skin. The head of the beast resembles that of a Buddhist lion-dog but is topped by a single hornlike projection with a bifurcated tip, flapping ears, bushy eyebrows, round eyes, triangular snout, and tightly curled hair framing its face. Its open mouth displays two straight rows of teeth as well as four sharp fangs. The entire head is removable, revealing a circular opening into the central cavity of the censer.

The mythical animal represented here is frequently, but mistakenly, identified as a *qilin* 麒麟. It is in fact a *luduan* 甬端, a name so rarely used and understood that it is easily misread even by the Chinese as *jiaoduan* 角端, since the first character looks very similar and differs only in the lack of a single hooked stroke at the top. The *luduan* is characterized by its rounded body and tense stance, whereas the *qilin* has a more elongated body that is usually shown covered with small scales. In addition, *qilin* are properly depicted with hooved feet, whereas this animal has claws.¹

In Chinese mythology, the *luduan* is a highly auspicious beast with an ability to detect the truth and traverse great distances in a short time. It is said to be fluent in all languages of the world. Whenever it encounters a wise and virtuous ruler, it offers books as tribute. The *luduan* figures in a well-known but debatable account of Genghis Khan returning in victory to Mongolia in 1224 after being told by his adviser Yelü Chucai 耶律楚材 (1189–1243) that such an auspicious animal had been sighted.²

Bronze censers in the form of *luduan* are known to have been made as early as the Song dynasty (960–1279). In 1973, a Song censer was excavated from the late Ming tomb of a



Front view of censer



Rear view of censer

scholar-official, Zhang Shupeī 張叔珮 (1552–1615), in Tongliang 銅梁 county, Sichuan province.³ Animal-shaped censers were favored in tombs from Song through Ming, but they were also used in daily life from Ming times on. *Ludian*-form censers became especially popular during the early seventeenth century, when they were made in large quantities in bronze and in cloisonné enamel.

Censers of this kind were made and used over a wide geographical area, which suggests that there must have been considerable variation in regional styles.⁴ Although the overall form remained fairly consistent, there was much room for individual expression in the details of the head, body, and feet of the *ludian* as well as in the serpent underfoot. Customers were probably able to order different or no additional surface treatments for their bronzes from a workshop (e.g., gilt bronze, silvered bronze, parcel-gilt bronze, gilt and silvered bronze, or simply plain bronze) according to budget.⁵ There was, of course, also a wide range of sizes from the miniature to the near monumental to suit every need.⁶

While early *ludian* censers had hinged covers, another type developed where the entire head could be lifted off and replaced. This meant that the front of the animal would not be dominated by a hinge and that the chest area could be emphasized or further articulated



Side view of censer



View from above, with cover removed

with detail. In this alternate design, the fact that the censer actually consists of two separate parts is not obvious, so the effect of seeing incense smoke magically emerging from the *luduan*'s open mouth is all the more captivating. Numerous censers of this type were made during the seventeenth century.⁷ Their popularity at this time may be seen in an illustration of a *luduan*-form censer in the *Shizhu zhai jian pu* 《十竹齋箋譜》 (Ten Bamboo Studio Catalogue of Letter Paper Designs), a color woodblock-printed compendium of nearly 280 designs for stationery papers compiled by Hu Zhengyan 胡正言 (1584 or 1585–1674). This work first appeared in Nanjing in late 1644 or early 1645, at the time of the Ming-Qing political cataclysm, followed by a second round of printing later in 1645. The wide availability of the catalogue, as well as the actual stationery papers, served to disseminate the design and to inspire increased production of such censers.⁸

While retaining some late Ming characteristics, such as the freely curving spirals on the haunches, the Kresko *luduan* displays a certain formality and stylization that is more typical of the early Qing. The strict scalloping of the horizontal scales on the chest, the precision of the suspended ensemble of bell and tassels, the stylized *ruyi*-forms on the head, and the carefully modeled eyebrows, beard, and hair encircling the face all point to a Yongzheng or Qianlong period style.

During the eighteenth century, when the Qing rulers fully consolidated their power over the whole empire, pairs of *luduan*-form censers filled one throne hall after another in imperial and princely palaces, not only in Beijing but also in all the other auxiliary palace complexes.⁹ Formerly installed in a throne hall at the palace at Shenyang was a pair of very large *luduan* censers in gilt bronze; the hinged heads of these censers sit atop enormous, globular, scaly bodies inset with turquoise decoration. So great was their physical presence and symbolic power that there was no need for the snakes beneath their feet.¹⁰ The Qing imperial predilection for *luduan* censers undoubtedly had an impact on the popularization of this auspicious animal in the decorative arts. Those who could afford the expense obtained them in gilt bronze or cloisonné enamel, but *luduan*-form objects were also made in less costly materials that made them more accessible.

While censers in the form of *luduan* are common, they can vary considerably in craftsmanship and finish. Those that were made for burial purposes, especially the earlier examples, clearly did not need to be as well made as those meant for display in domestic settings, whether imperial or otherwise. The Kresko piece represents a mature stage of development in the design and decoration of such objects. It is fully and beautifully finished, visually interesting from every angle, and succeeds as a sculptural work in its own right. Poised at the intersection of boldness and delicacy, it straddles the functional and the decorative in a remarkable way.

Technical Notes

The head of the animal acts as the lid to the censer, with smoke escaping through its open mouth. A deep flange inside the flaring neck of the head fits snugly into the hole on the body and keeps the head securely in place. The head and body were separately cast and very nicely finished. The detailed decoration appears to be cast, but some cold-carving may have been used to shape features (based on tool marks such as those at the front of the nose).

Provenance

The Oriental Art Gallery Limited, London, until 1993; Collection of Robert E. Kresko, St. Louis, 1993–2005.

Published

The Oriental Art Gallery Limited, *Oriental Works of Art: Opening Tuesday, 8th June 1993* (London: The Oriental Art Gallery Limited, 1993), cat. no. 126.

Exhibited

"In the Shadow of Dragons: The Robert Kresko Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes," The Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas, Texas, March 7–September 9, 2001.

¹ For visual representations of *qilin* throughout Chinese history, see Xu Huadang, *Zhongguo qilin yishu* (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin meishu chubanshe, 2003). For a late Ming censer in the form of a seated *qilin* (correctly shown with hooved feet), first half of the seventeenth century, cast bronze with cast and cold-worked surface details and traces of gilding, Phoenix Art Museum, Robert H. Clague Collection, see Robert D. Mowry, *China's Renaissance in Bronze: The Robert H. Clague Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes, 1100–1900* (Phoenix, Ariz.: Phoenix Art Museum, 1993), pp. 222–23, cat. no. 58.

² See Wang Ting, “‘Jiaoduan’ yu Chengjisi Han xizheng banshi,” *Shilin (Historical Review)*, (2004, no. 6) (serial no. 81), pp. 108–14, continued on p. 107, accompanied by abstract in English, “Jiaoduan and Chingis Khan’s Returning after Victory from West,” p. 124.

³ The Song censer is quite large; see Ye Zuofu, “Sichuan Tongliang Ming Zhang Shupeifufu mu,” *Wenwu (Cultural Relics)*, no. 398 (1989, no. 7), pp. 45–46, figs. 14–16; and Guoli gugong bowu yuan (National Palace Museum), *Jintong fojiao gongju tezhan (A Special Exhibition of Buddhist Votive Objects)* [Taipei: Guoli gugong bowu yuan (National Palace Museum), 1995], p. 33, fig. 20.

⁴ For several other similar parcel-gilt bronze censers with hinged covers, see Sydney L. Moss Ltd., *The Second Bronze Age: Later Chinese Metalwork* (London: Sydney L. Moss Ltd., 1991), cat. no. 18 (Ming, mid-sixteenth to early seventeenth century) and cat. no. 19 (Ming to Qing, seventeenth century); and a censer in the form of a *ludian*, Ming or Qing, seventeenth to eighteenth century, in Christie’s Hong Kong, *Important Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art*, Sale 2018, November 2, 1999, lot no. 794.

⁵ Christie’s London, *Fine Chinese Ceramics, Jades and Works of Art*, Sale 3746, December 14, 1987, p. 129, lot no. 313.

⁶ For a graduated arrangement by size and height of five such *ludian*-form bronze censers in the collection of Wang Du (Wellington Wang), Taipei, see Guoli lishi bowu guan (National Museum of History), *Xiangxun xianglu nuanlu (Censers, Incense Burners and Hand Warmers: Wellington Wang Collection)* [Taipei: Guoli lishi bowu guan (National Museum of History), 2000], pp. 110–13, cat. nos. 83–7.

⁷ For instance, parcel-gilt bronze, Sotheby’s London, *Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art*, December 11, 1990, pp. 32–3, lot no. 45; and one in the National Palace Museum, Taipei, bronze inlaid with gold and silver, published in Chen Qingguang, “Qing miao jinyin tong jiaoduan xiangxun,” *Gugong wenwu yuekan (The National Palace Museum Monthly of Chinese Art)*, vol. 11, no. 6 (September 1993) (cumulative no. 126), p. 1; Guoli gugong bowu yuan (National Palace Museum), *Gugong lidai xiangju tulu (A Special Exhibition of Incense Burners and Perfumers Throughout the Dynasties)* [Taipei: Guoli gugong bowu yuan (National Palace Museum), 1994], p. 264, cat. no. 118 (color illustration), and pp. 306–307, cat. no. 118 (catalogue

entry; described as eighteenth century); and Yang Meili, “Wan Ming Qing chu fang gu qi de zuose—yi tongqi, yuqi weizhu de yanjiu,” *Gugong xueshu jikan (The National Palace Museum Research Quarterly)*, vol. 22, no. 3 (Spring 2005), p. 48, fig. 14 (described as late Ming or early Qing).

⁸ The Ten Bamboo Studio (Shizhu zhai 十竹齋) was the name of Hu Zhengyan’s studio in Nanjing. The *ludian*-form censer that he illustrated for a stationery design was in his own collection, since it is accompanied by a caption reading *Shizhu zhai zhencang* 十竹齋珍藏 (“Treasured and kept at the Ten Bamboo Studio”). For a reproduction of the *ludian*-form censer from the *Shizhu zhai jian pu*, see Ip Yee and Laurence C. S. Tam, *Chinese Bamboo Carving (Zhongguo zhuke yishu)* [Hong Kong: Urban Council (Shizheng ju), 1978–1982], vol. 1, p. 179, fig. 15. On the *Shizhu zhai jian pu*, see Suzanne E. Wright, “*Luoxuan biangu jianpu* and *Shizhuzhai jianpu*: Two Late-Ming Catalogues of Letter Paper Designs,” *Artibus Asiae*, vol. 63, no. 1 (2003), pp. 69–122.

⁹ See, for instance, a pair of *ludian* flanking the throne in the Hall of Supreme Harmony in the Forbidden City, Beijing, and similarly positioned in other major throne rooms within the palace complex. For a pair of large Qianlong-period *ludian* censers in cloisonné enamel from the Palace Museum, Beijing, see Musée du Petit Palais, *La Cité interdite: Vie publique et privée des empereurs de Chine (1644–1911)* [Paris: Paris-Musées (Éditions des musées de la Ville de Paris); Paris: Association Française d’Action Artistique, 1996], pp. 163–65, cat. nos. 37–38.

¹⁰ Each censer height 43 cm, length 32 cm, Shenyang Palace Museum, Shenyang, Liaoning province, published in Robert L. Thorp, *Son of Heaven: Imperial Arts of China* (Seattle: Son of Heaven Press, 1988), p. 40, cat. no. 33 (cat. no. 34 not illustrated), and p. 94.



No. 35

帶蓋局部鑲金銅龍鳳海獸波濤紋長方香爐

*Covered Censer with Design of Dragons and Phoenixes in Clouds
and Sea Creatures in Waves*

Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Qianlong period (1736–1795), mid- to late 18th century

Cast bronze with cold-working, with gilding and induced surface color

height 34.6 cm, width 23.3 cm, depth 18.5 cm

Saint Louis Art Museum, Partial and promised gift of Robert E. Kresko

13:2005a,b

The body of this finely cast bronze censer is oval or “superelliptical” in cross-section. It is supported on a pedestal, with a narrow, stepped waistband between the two parts. The foot of the pedestal is a plain register that flares outward. Decorating the ground of the body are lively dragons frolicking amidst turbulent waves, while mythical sea creatures float in the waves on the pedestal. A single band of clouds, all shaped like *ruyi*-scepter heads, defines the horizon between sea and sky. Each of the shorter ends of the censer’s body has an oval lion-head mask; seen in profile, the high relief of the masks gives them the semblance of handles by which the censer may be lifted. The dragons, mythical sea creatures, and monster masks are all highlighted by gilding. The frontal aspect of the censer is denoted by a horizontal four-character inscription reading *Qianlong nian zhi* 乾隆年製 (“Made in the Qianlong era”).

The fitted cover, whose everted lip almost exactly corresponds to the shape of the flat mouth rim of the body, appears to contain a volume equal to that of the censer’s body. In contrast to the body’s solid walls, the cover is cast with openwork design of fluid, interconnected clouds, along with two dragons, one on each of the long sides, and by two phoenixes, one on each of the short sides. From the top of the cover rises an elaborate knob, which consists of a lotus-petal base, a short neck, upwardly opening lotus petals, and a register of vertical ribs, topped by a coiled dragon chasing a pearl amidst openwork clouds. The frontal aspect of the cover is undoubtedly the side with the face of the uppermost dragon and the pearl, which form an axis with the four-character reign mark directly below on the censer’s body. As on the body and pedestal, the principal decorative motifs on the cover are also gilded to lend greater visibility.

It is clear that the design of this covered censer derives from a type that first appeared during the Kangxi period (1662–1722) and is represented by another work in the Kresko collection (No. 18).¹ The earlier Qing examples tend to be smaller in scale, with more prominently protruding monster or lion-head masks at either end of the body, from which free rings may be suspended. In addition, the prototypical vessels have knobs that appear to “fuse” with the designs on the cover, unlike this Qianlong piece where the knob is

presented as a discrete form deliberately set apart from the rest of the cover. In fact, in terms of form and proportion, the cover and its knob are more akin to European Baroque and Rococo designs than they are to classic Chinese ones. Finally, most Kangxi-period covered censers of this type have pedestals decorated with lotus-petal lappets rather than the sea creatures in waves seen in the present piece.

The extravagant and finely worked decoration here is so characteristic of the Qianlong period, especially the later portion of the reign, that it would not have been difficult to date the piece to the mid- or late eighteenth century even without the benefit of a reign mark. There is no question that this piece is a commissioned product from an imperial workshop; no other comparable example is known and it may well be a unique work.²



View of the censer with cover removed



Side view of the censer

Technical Notes

The cover and body of the censer are separately cast, with extensive cold-working (carving) of details and the reign mark. The cover is assembled with three sections: two for the finial and one for the body, all attached with solder. The foot ring of the censer is attached to the body with solder, visible on the exterior and interior at the line of the joint, which is open along one side. The mask handles are riveted in place, with solder present only along part of one edge. There are some small holes visible on the interior of the body and base that do not correspond to features on the exterior and may be for casting.

The gilding on the body extends from the figures onto the background, with more of a splash effect than the distinct highlights of the cover. The induced patina on the ungilded areas differs in color and gloss on the body and cover. Some of the engraved details on the cover differ from those on the body. The metals could be sampled to confirm whether cover and body are the same alloy and therefore belong together, but visual inspection suggests that they have been married from two different censers.

Provenance

Sydney L. Moss Ltd., London, 1993–1994; Collection of Robert E. Kresko, St. Louis, 1994–2005.

Published

Saint Louis Art Museum, “Robert E. Kresko Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes,” *Saint Louis Art Museum Magazine* (April–June 2005), p. 12.

Exhibited

“In the Shadow of Dragons: The Robert Kresko Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes,” The Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas, Texas, March 7–September 9, 2001.

¹ See also a covered censer with two lion-head handles and with decoration of imaginary beasts against waves, the cover with dragons and phoenixes amidst clouds, Qing dynasty, Kangxi period, cast bronze with cast decoration, with cold-worked details and a cast thread-relief mark in regular-script (*kaishu* 楷書) characters reading *Da Ming Xuande nian zhi* 大明宣德年製 in a recessed rectangular cartouche on the base, Robert H. Clague Collection, in Robert D. Mowry, *China's Renaissance in Bronze: The Robert H. Clague Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes, 1100–1900* (Phoenix, Ariz.: Phoenix Art Museum, 1993), pp. 111–15, cat. no. 21.

² Compare this to another unique Qing design for a parcel-gilt bronze censer with a very elaborate open-work cover and a knob in the form of a double lotus seedpod containing movable seeds and gilt lappets, in Gerard Hawthorn Ltd., *Oriental Works of Art: Opening 8 June–26 June 1999* (London: Gerard Hawthorn Ltd., 1999), cat. no. 15. This work has an apocryphal Xuande mark and is ascribed a late seventeenth or eighteenth century date, but it appears to be a work from the Qianlong period.



No. 36

浮雕龍鳳紋鎏金銅雙管瓶

Double Vase with Stylized Dragon-and-Phoenix Design

Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Qianlong period (1736–1795), late 18th century

Cast bronze or copper alloy with gilding and tinted surface coating

height 13.9 cm, width 11 cm, depth 7.5 cm

Collection of Robert E. Kresko

This decorative object comprises two spindle-shaped vases of different heights arranged side by side and joined at their widest points. When viewed from the front, the taller vase stands to the right. Each of the component vases has a deerlike head on the upper portions at the front and back. The heads on the taller vase grasp in their mouths squarish fixed rings, while those on the shorter vase are fitted with more rounded rings, also fixed. In all four heads, the eyes of the animals are cast downward, shaded by prominent brows in the form of tight scrolls. Decorating the remainder of the vases is a *chi*-dragon (*chi long* 螭龍) on the front and a phoenix on the reverse. The heads of these mythical creatures are rendered in a zoomorphic manner, while their bodies are represented in an archaistic mode of squared scrolls, with extended curls emerging from various points and at the tails. Also projecting out of the squared scrolls are several leafy stems with single flowers in full bloom. The more prominent head of the *chi*-dragon, on the front side, reaches upward from the rim of the shorter vase and forms a bridge to that of the taller one; it serves as a handle for the object. Gold splashes applied to the exterior appear in somewhat random fashion, but all the most important features (namely the heads of the *chi*-dragon and the phoenix, the antlers or horns on the deerlike animal heads, and the suspended rings) are thus highlighted. On the bottom of the taller vase is a four-character reign mark reading *Qianlong nian zhi* 乾隆年製 (“Made in the Qianlong era”).

Double and conjoined *objets d’art* were already made in significant quantities during the Ming dynasty, but they became especially popular during the Yongzheng and Qianlong periods in the eighteenth century. In most double or conjoined works, the two objects are of the same size or equal height. The asymmetrical double vase, as seen in this piece, seems to be a specific development of the Qianlong period, for nearly all the published examples feature Qianlong reign marks. No prototypical double vase of this type has yet been identified, since almost none are dated by year, but clearly one initial object or group of objects must have generated great interest at the palace at some point. Such double vases were made in a wide range of sizes, from the miniature to the very substantial. In addition to bronze, they were also produced in other materials—for instance, gilt bronze, cloisonné enamel, champlevé enamel, or rock crystal—or combinations thereof. While the conjoining of larger and smaller ovoid vases remained more or less a standard feature within the typology, along with the superimposition of archaistic dragon-and-phoenix designs, there is a surprising variety of sizes and individualized details.



Rear view of double vase



Fig. 10: Double vase with archaistic *chi*-dragon design; Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Qianlong period (1736–1795); cast bronze with gilding; height 9 cm; © Christie's Images Ltd.

A number of notable double vases of this kind are worthy of mention as comparative works. The National Palace Museum, Taipei, has a miniature bronze double vase that is less than a third the height of the Kresko piece but is very finely worked.¹ Among the most magnificent examples of such Qianlong-period double vases is the well-known one formerly in the collection of the noted British connoisseur W. W. Winkworth.² The double vase (Fig. 10) bears an incised four-character Qianlong reign mark (*Qianlong nian zhi* 乾隆年製) and has extremely refined decoration superimposed on the gilt-splashed ovoid vases.³ As William Watson notes, “No better example could be found of the fantastic treatment of traditional elements of bronze ornament. A pre-Han convention survives in the spirals which pervade the design, though no single major form is copied from the antique.”⁴ An almost identical double vase is in the Robert H. Clague Collection, Phoenix Art Museum.⁵

In the medium of cloisonné enamel, a large double vase with interlocking floral design is in the Palace Museum, Beijing.⁶ Here, all the low-relief, high-relief, and openwork decorative elements that appear to be applied to the cloisonné enamel surfaces of the vases are very finely worked and gilded. Another closely related example is an ornate gilt bronze and champlevé enamel double vase in the collection of Alice and Pierre Uldry in Switzerland; it is dated 1786, decorated with gilded dragons and phoenixes in relief and with lotus scrolls, and raised on a matching eight-footed stand.⁷

Technical Notes

The heavy double vase appears to be integrally cast, with some cold-working of the cast decoration. The bases may be inset, but this is not confirmed. Tool marks around the frame of the reign mark suggest cold-working. Casting flaws and imperfections were not removed in finishing. The gilding does not highlight specific features but is applied as large, flat splashes.

Provenance

Sotheby's London, 1998.

Published

Sotheby's London, *Fine Chinese Ceramics, Works of Art and Chinese Export Art*, Sale LN8765/8677, November 18, 1998, p. 92, lot no. 884.

¹ Double vase with dragon-and-phoenix decoration and four-character mark (*Qianlong nian zhi* 乾隆年製), gilt bronze (*Gu tong* 故銅 02408), in Guoli gugong bowu yuan (National Palace Museum), *Gu se: Shiliu zhi shiba shiji yishu de fanggu feng (Through the Prism of the Past: Antiquarian Trends in Chinese Art of the 16th to 18th Century)* [Taipei: Guoli gugong bowu yuan (National Palace Museum), 2003], p. 157, cat. no. III-22 (illustrations and captions), and p. 248, cat. no. III-22 (cat. entry).

² On William Wilberforce Winkworth (1897–1991), see John V. G. Mallet, “Obituary: W. W. Winkworth (1897–1991),” *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 133, no. 1062 (September 1991), pp. 622–23.

³ See William Watson, “On Some Categories of Archaism in Chinese Bronze,” *Ars Orientalis*, vol. 9 (1973), fig. 28; R. Soame Jenyns and William Watson, *Chinese Art II: Gold, Silver, Later Bronzes, Cloisonné, Cantonese Enamel, Lacquer, Furniture, Wood*, rev. ed.

(New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1980), p. 74 and p. 84, pl. 50; and Christie's London, *Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art*, Sale 6213, November 16, 1999, pp. 60–61, lot no. 106.

⁴ Jenyns and Watson, *Chinese Art II*, p. 74 (descriptive text) and p. 84, pl. 50 (illustration).

⁵ Qianlong period, probably last quarter of the eighteenth century; cast bronze with cast and cold-worked decoration, and with an incised intaglio mark in standard-script characters reading *Qianlong nian zhi* 乾隆年製 on the countersunk base of the larger vase, in Robert D. Mowry, *China's Renaissance in Bronze: The Robert H. Clague Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes, 1100–1900* (Phoenix, Ariz.: Phoenix Art Museum, 1993), pp. 190–91, cat. no. 40.

⁶ Six-character mark (*Da Qing Qianlong nian zhi* 大清乾隆年製) on the base of larger vase, Qianlong period, in Li Jiufang, ed., *Jinshu tai falang qi (Metal-bodied Enamel Ware)* (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshu guan (Xianggang) youxian gongsi [The Commercial Press (Hong Kong) Ltd.], 2002), p. 103, no. 100.

⁷ Helmut Brinker and Albert Lutz, *Chinese Cloisonné: The Pierre Uldry Collection* (New York: The Asia Society Galleries, in association with London: Bamboo Publishing Ltd., 1989), p. 136 and cat. no. 304. Its mate, formerly in the collection of Matthew Chaloner Durfee Borden (1842–1912), has surfaced several times on the market. See Christie's New York, *Fine Chinese Ceramics, Works of Art and Furniture*, Sale 7084, June 1, 1990, p. 53, lot no. 103; Sotheby's New York, *Fine Chinese Decorative Works of Art*, Sale 6074, October 18–19, 1990, lot no. 244; and Sotheby's New York, *Fine Chinese Ceramics, Furniture and Works of Art*, Sale 6963, March 19, 1997, lot no. 148.



View of double vases's base, showing reign mark



No. 37

銅嵌金銀鳳凰辟邪螭龍雙管瓶

Double Vase with Decoration of Phoenix, Chimera, and Chi-Dragon

Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Qianlong period (1736–1795) or Jiaqing period (1796–1820), late 18th–early 19th century

Cast bronze with damascened overlays of gilt copper and silver, with an induced patina and artificial corrosion
height 46 cm, width 34 cm

Saint Louis Art Museum, Partial and promised gift of Robert E. Kresko

18:2005

This dramatic double vase is made up of a number of visually discrete components. Below each of the two tall containers with cylindrical midsections is a banded stem and a splayed foot, while above each is a waisted neck and an everted mouth. The midsections of the cylinders taper outward and upward almost imperceptibly, and a thickened band around each one divides the surfaces into upper and lower sections, with the upper section occupied by one wide band of archaizing decorative pattern and the lower occupied by two wide bands. The wave design on the cylinders may be related to those found on certain groups of late Western Zhou dynasty (c.1050–771 B.C.) bronzes of the ninth century B.C. unearthed at various locations in Fufeng 扶風 county, Shaanxi province.¹ Unlike the vigor of line so distinctive in the archaic models, however, the delineation of the wave patterns on this double vase seems much flatter in comparison. The designs on the cylinders defer to the more sculptural elements at the center front and back of the piece.

Decorating the front of the ensemble is an appliquéd phoenix (*fenghuang* 鳳凰) standing on the head of a chimera (*bixie* 辟邪, whose name in Chinese means “to ward off evil”).² Thought to derive from Persian or West Asian sources, the phoenix first appeared in jade carvings during the Han dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 220). In the Eastern Han dynasty (A.D. 9–220) and the Six Dynasties period (220–589), it assumed monumental proportions in stone and served as a guardian animal at imperial and aristocratic tombs. The Chinese chimera possesses a combination of animal characteristics: a pair of long curving horns, pointed ears, rounded eyes with hooded lids, furrowed brow, and pointed snout. It has a tense, muscular, leonine body with its paws extended, sharp claws firmly grasping the cylinders’ bases. The chimera would normally be shown with feathered wings that lie flat against the body, but here they have been left out because they would be obscured by the double vase itself. Its tail, which would usually be rendered as flamelike projections, is reduced to two simple curls visible when viewed from the back of the object. The reverse side of the double vase is appliquéd with a highly stylized *chi*-dragon, whose bifurcated tail comes up and out from behind the body as two large curls. All three animals are decorated with inlaid gilt copper and silver, as are parts of the decorative designs on the vases.



Rear view of double vase



Side view of double vase

The composite nature of this double vase reflects the complex and fascinating process of “mixing and matching” of forms and styles that developed over a long period of time. The prominent “bird-on-beast” design may be traced back to wooden sculpture and lacquerware made in the powerful state of Chu 楚 during the Warring States period (c.475–221 B.C.). Double vases decorated with phoenixes, chimeras, and *chi*-dragons appeared well before the Ming dynasty, though very few examples from the Song and Yuan survive.

By the sixteenth century, the double vase had regained a certain popularity and would become well established as a type in various materials, such as jade (nephrite), bronze, gilt bronze, bronze inlaid with gold or silver (or both), cloisonné enamel, and rhinoceros horn.³ Ming double vases tended to be modest in size and fairly subdued in decorative detail (compared to numerous Qing examples, including the present piece), making them suitable for placement on a scholars’ desks or on shelves of collectibles without being too overwhelming. Those of the right height may even have been used as brush holders.

The eighteenth century was a time when many bronze double vases were produced in a pastiche fashion by assembling ancient and contemporary pieces.⁴ The continued popularity of this vessel type may be attributed in part to imperially sponsored publications such as the *Xiqing gujian* 《西清古鑑》 (Catalogue of Xiqing Antiquities) commissioned by the

Qianlong emperor. In *juan* 18 of this 1751 compilation, a line-drawing of a double vase is presented under the heading “dragon-and-phoenix double-tube vase of the Tang” (*Tang longfeng shuangguan ping* 唐龍鳳雙管瓶).⁵ The attribution to the Tang dynasty is incorrect, as is the identification of the animals as a dragon and phoenix, but all this does not seem to have prevented the woodblock-printed design from being freely adapted, in bronze or in other materials, during the Qing.

The design of double vases of this type reached its height during the Qianlong period, as with so many other kinds of decorative art. Craftsmen experimented with variant shapes and materials; indeed, nothing seemed too complicated or excessive for them. This was especially the case for works in cloisonné enamel, such as a very large and fanciful example in the Brooklyn Museum that features a pair of cloisonné enamel hexagonal vases whose main bodies are spectacularly decorated with floral motifs in a lattice pattern (Fig. 11).⁶



Fig. 11: Large twin vases; Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Qianlong period (1736–1795); cloisonné enamel on copper alloy, gilt bronzes; height 73.4 cm; Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Samuel P. Avery, Jr. (09.606a-b).

Technical Notes

The double vase was assembled from sections. The two separate vases were attached to their flared feet and to the chimera; solder is visible along some of the seams of the sections. The feet and the chimera were probably integrally cast as one unit. It is unclear whether the chimera's bifurcated tail was part of this cast or attached separately. Flat rings are visible inside both vases at the bottoms, probably to increase the surface area for attachment to the feet. The interior of each foot has a cruciform in double relief lines, and four small flanges, placed equidistantly around each foot, project inward. These were probably included in the cast as reinforcements. An open channel on the interior at the bottom extends between the vases through the beast.

The phoenix on the front and the dragon on the back of the piece were separately cast and attached in the following ways. The phoenix is attached to the chimera at the phoenix's ankles (probably with dowels; the seams have a fill material); the phoenix's feet were cast together with the chimera. Each of the phoenix's wings is secured to its respective vase with one rivet. A bronze rod projecting from the chimera secures the bottom of the dragon. The arms of the dragon are separate and attached to its body and to the vases with rivets. There may have been additional appendages, as two rivet heads are visible on the vases in a line with the dragon's eyes. There is a white metal repair on the tip of the dragon's proper left ear and another on the bottom register of the proper right vase, in a horizontal line at the front. Rivet heads and chaplets can be seen on the interiors.

Artificial corrosion has been applied on an induced patina (and over the white metal repairs noted above), as a heavy coating in areas (e.g., the necks of the vases), and using an aggregate mineral material in spots. The overlay metals are gilt copper and silver. Series of tool marks used to create a toothed surface under the overlays can be seen along the edges of some of the incised designs.

Designs on the vase, such as the background wave pattern, appear to be cast with minimal cold-finishing. The vase is well finished, but there are many unrepaired casting flaws in less conspicuous areas, for example, the underside of the chimera.

Provenance

Armin Lemp, Zurich, Switzerland, by 1962; Collection of Prof. and Mrs. Peter H. Plesch, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire, England, 1962–1994; Sydney L. Moss Ltd., London, 1994–1995; Collection of Robert E. Kresko, St. Louis, 1995–2005.

Published

Oriental Ceramic Society, *Catalogue of an Exhibition of the Animal in Chinese Art, Organised by the Arts Council of Great Britain and the Oriental Ceramic Society, June 19th to July 19th, 1968, at the Arts Council Gallery* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1968), cat. no. 112; Saint Louis Art Museum, *Biennial Report 2005–2006* (St. Louis, Mo.: Saint Louis Art Museum, 2007), p. 14.

Exhibited

"In the Shadow of Dragons: The Robert Kresko Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes," The Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas, Texas, March 7–September 9, 2001.

¹ See, for instance, the widest register of decoration on the monumental inscribed tripod known as the "Great Ke ding" (*da Ke ding* 大克鼎), c.899–889 B.C., reportedly excavated in 1890 at Famen Temple, Shanghai Museum, in Wen C. Fong, ed., *The Great Bronze Age of China: An Exhibition from the People's Republic of China* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1980), p. 243, fig. 79; Ma Chengyuan, *Ancient Chinese Bronzes* (Hong Kong and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 136–37 and pl. 51; Li Xixing, ed., *Shaanxi qingtong qi* (*The Shaanxi Bronzes*) [Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin meishu chubanshe (Shaanxi People's Fine Arts Publishing House), 1994], p. 65, pl. 31; and Chen Peifen, *Ancient Chinese Bronzes in the Shanghai Museum* (London: Scala Books, 1995), pp. 70–71, pl. 43. The Saint Louis Art Museum has an imposing *hu* vessel (Museum Purchase; 281:1948) in its collection that features three bands of the wave design; see Steven D. Owyong, *Ancient Chinese Bronzes in The Saint Louis Art Museum* (St. Louis, Mo.: The Saint Louis Art Museum, 1997), pp. 128–30, cat. no. 36.

² The *bixie*, a term used more frequently in northern China, is sometimes also called the *pixiu* 貔貅 (a name more popular in southern China), and may also be referred to as the *tianlu* 天祿 (“heaven’s blessing”).

³ For a selection of Ming examples, see the following: double vase (with one band of archaistic bronze decoration, near the top of the twin cylinders), bronze, The Burrell Collection, Glasgow, Scotland, in Richard Marks et al., *The Burrell Collection* (London and Glasgow: William Collins Sons and Company Limited, in association with Glasgow: Glasgow Museums and Art Galleries, 1983), p. 65, no. 9 (right side); and Shelagh McPherson, “Chinese Art in the Burrell Collection,” *Bulletin of the Oriental Ceramic Society of Hong Kong*, no. 7 (1984–1986), p. 59, fig. 29; double vase with wood stand, bronze, in Sotheby’s Paris, *Arts d’Asie*, Sale PF7007, June 14, 2007, p. 46, lot no. 54; double vase, cloisonné enamel and gilt bronze, in *ibid.*, p. 47, lot no. 55.

⁴ Probably the best-known case is a so-called champion vase in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, whose cylindrical tubes, attractively inlaid with gold and silver, appear to be the kind used for chariot fittings and are from the Western Han dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 8), second to first century B.C., but the mountings (including the phoenix and chimera) are much later Qing-dynasty mountings from the eighteenth century and have fewer fine inlays of gold and silver, Salting Bequest (M.730–1910), in Joan M. Hartman, “The Champion Vase—History and Symbolism,” *Oriental Art*, n.s. vol. 20, no. 4 (Winter 1974), p. 420, figs. 8a and 8b; Rose Kerr, *Later Chinese Bronzes* (London: Bamboo Publishing Ltd., in association with London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1990), p. 75, pl. 57; Rose Kerr, ed., *Chinese Art and Design: The T. T. Tsui Gallery of Chinese Art* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1991), pp. 226–27, no. 106; and Evelyn S. Rawski and Jessica Rawson, eds., *China: The Three Emperors, 1662–1795* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2005), p. 291, cat. no. 209 (color illustration), and p. 443, cat. no. 209 (descriptive text). Double vases of this kind have long been described in the West as a champion vase. The term derives from the Chinese *yingxiong ping*

英雄瓶 (“hero’s vase”) and its homophonic equivalent, *yingxiong ping* 鷹熊瓶 (“falcon-and-bear vase”), based on the common but erroneous identification of the bird and beast as a falcon (*ying* 鷹) and a bear (*xiong* 熊). Therefore, both the English term “champion vase” and the Chinese *yingxiong ping* should be avoided.

⁵ See Ming S. Wilson, *Chinese Jades* (London: V&A Publications, 2004), p. 106, pl. 107.

⁶ Double vase, Qianlong period, cloisonné enamel on copper alloy, Gift of Samuel P. Avery Jr. (09.606), in John Getz, *Catalogue of the Avery Collection of Ancient Chinese Cloisonnés* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Museum of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, 1912), pp. 24–5, cat. no. 42; R.L. Hobson et al., *The Romance of Chinese Art* (New York: Garden City Publishing Co., Inc., 1936), between p. 146 and p. 147, no. 6; Joan M. Hartman, “The Champion Vase—History and Symbolism,” *Oriental Art*, n.s. vol. 20, no. 4 (Winter 1974), p. 421, fig. 9a, and p. 422, fig. 9b; and Lin Xiaoping, “The Blue of Jingtai: The Samuel P. Avery Jr. Collection of Chinese Cloisonné in The Brooklyn Museum,” *Oriental Art*, vol. 21, no. 7 (July 1990), p. 33, figs. 6 and 6a.

No. 38

帶雙龍戲珠紋蓋海水瑞獸紋海棠花式銅香爐

*Covered Censer with Design of Dragons in Clouds
and Sea Creatures in Waves*

Qing dynasty (1644–1911), 19th century

Cast copper alloy with cold-worked details, with a tinted coating; height 13.8 cm, width 18.2 cm, depth 15 cm

Saint Louis Art Museum, Partial and promised gift of Robert E. Kresko

12:2005a,b

This covered censer has a compressed form that is quatrefoil-lobed in cross-section. The body is decorated in relief with a continuous frieze of mythical marine creatures frolicking amidst cresting waves, with alternating areas of clouds shaped like *ruyi*-scepter heads. At either end of the long axis is a monster head. Their presence visually elongates the silhouette of the vessel, relieving some of its tightness and giving it a much more elegant form. The short and slightly tapered neck and foot of the censer are virtually mirror images and similarly decorated with single horizontal bands of sharply incised squared spirals. When viewed from various angles, the dense pattern of the spirals appears as linked diamond shapes or as a diaper border. On the recessed base is a countersunk rectangle containing a six-character apocryphal reign mark reading *Da Ming Xuande nian zhi* 大明宣德年製 (“Made in the Xuande era of the Great Ming”).

The slightly splayed rim of the fitted cover, which exactly conforms to the outline of the censer’s mouth, also has a single horizontal band of squared spirals that visually connect it to the decoration of the censer’s neck and foot. An openwork net of small *ruyi*-shaped clouds, anchored at the apex with a single large *ruyi* cloud and surmounted by a pair of scaly dragons pursuing flaming pearls, makes up the rest of the cover. Both dragons bite at the apical cloud while their bodies and tails swing downward and to the right. What may come across as light brown patina is actually an applied coating; the vessel is in fact largely devoid of patination.

Among censers of the Qing dynasty, which are most often round and sometimes oval, rectangular, or square in cross-section, this object stands out for its relatively uncommon form. However, the Chinese term used to describe the quatrefoil shape, *haitang hua shi* 海棠花式 (literally, “crabapple flower form”), is actually a misnomer, for crabapples blossoms have five petals rather than just four.¹ The term may well have been coined out of a need to distinguish quatrefoil shapes from pentafoil ones, which in Chinese are usually called *meihua shi* 梅花式 (“prunus flower form,” with specific reference to the five-petaled blossom of the Japanese apricot or *Prunus mume*).





View of censer with cover removed



View of censer's cover

The decorative scheme of mythical sea creatures on the body and dragons amidst clouds on the cover is derived from early Qing, Kangxi-period (1662–1722) covered censers such as the example in the Kresko collection discussed earlier in this catalogue (No. 18). Vessels of various kinds (such as vases, bowls, platters, and boxes) with lobed quatrefoil sections were especially popular during the Qianlong period (1736–1795), not only in bronzes and gilt bronzes but also in other materials such as jade, agate, cloisonné enamel, and carved lacquer.

Although the design of this covered censer adheres fairly closely to the conventions of the eighteenth century, the bright, unpatinated metal underneath the brown-tinted coating is a good indication that this object was very likely made sometime during the nineteenth century, possibly even up to the demise of the Qing dynasty in 1911. While the six characters of the apocryphal Xuande reign mark on the base are not nearly as well formed (in terms of calligraphic form and balance) or as meticulously juxtaposed against each other within the confines of the rectangular cartouche when compared to the best bronzes of the Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong periods, the object still holds its own through its interesting form and as an example of technically proficient bronze casting in the twilight of China's last imperial era.



View of censer's base, showing apocryphal reign mark

Technical Notes

The censer is well cast and finished. The cover and censer were each integrally cast, with cold-worked details of the decoration. The mask handles appear to have been separately attached. The reign mark shows tool marks, indicating cold-working. The censer has a heavy, brown-tinted coating that covers bright, unpatinated metal.

Provenance

Sotheby's New York, 1994; Roger Keverne Limited, London, 1994–1997; Collection of Robert E. Kresko, St. Louis, 1997–2005.

Published

Sotheby's New York, *Fine Chinese Ceramics, Furniture and Works of Art*, Sale 6571, May 31–June 1, 1994, lot no. 449; Roger Keverne and Michael Gillingham, *The Kunstammer: A Collector's Cabinet* (London: Roger Keverne and Michael Gillingham, 1997), cat. no. 77.

Exhibited

"In the Shadow of Dragons: The Robert Kresko Collection of Later Chinese Bronzes," The Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas, Texas, March 7–September 9, 2001.

¹ In China, the principal species include *Malus hupehensis* (Chinese crabapple or tea crabapple), whose botanical derives from the Chinese province of Hubei (spelled *Hupei* in the old Wade-Giles system of romanization) and *Malus honanensis* (Honon crab) named for the province of Henan (*Honan* in Wade-Giles romanization).



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Cover detail and back cover

*Tripod Censer with Loop Handles and
Matching Stand*

No. 28

Frontispiece

*Tripod Censer with Chi-Dragon Handles
and Lion-Dog Knob on Openwork Cover*
(detail)

No. 14

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*Altar Vase with Animal-Head Loop Handles
and Quatrefoil Rings* (detail)

No. 4

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Daoist Ritual Vessel (detail)

No. 15

This volume, one of very few in English to treat this fascinating subject in a comprehensive way, begins with an essay by Steven D. Owyong, the Saint Louis Art Museum's Curator of Asian Art from 1983 to 2005, on the building of the remarkable Kresko collection. It is followed by an overview of later Chinese bronzes by Robert D. Mowry, the Alan J. Dworsky Curator of Chinese Art at the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museums. The thirty-eight catalogue entries by Philip K. Hu, the Saint Louis Art Museum's Associate Curator of Asian Art and head of the Department of Asian Art, are accompanied by color illustrations and technical notes by Laura Gorman, the Museum's Object Conservator. An extensive bibliography of international sources both documents and advances the study of later Chinese bronzes.

Front and back cover illustrations:

No. 28

雙冲耳三乳足鼎式灑金銅連座香爐

Tripod Censer with Loop Handles and Matching Stand

Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Kangxi period (1662–1722) through
Qianlong period (1736–1795), 18th century

Cast bronze with applied gold splashes, height with stand 14.8 cm.
Saint Louis Art Museum

Partial and promised gift of Robert E. Kresko

10:2005a,b

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